

ECONOMY:
ART, PRODUCTION AND THE SUBJECT IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ECONOMY:
Art, Production and the Subject
in the Twenty-first Century

Edited and with an introduction by
Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd

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Ursula Biemann

Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz

Tracey Emin

Claire Fontaine

Andrea Fraser

Melanie Gilligan

Johan Grimonprez

Andreas Gursky

Kai Kaljo

Owen Logan

Rick Lowe

Jenny Marketou

Dani Marti

Angela Melitopoulos

Marge Monko

Tanja Ostojić

Anu Pennanen

Stéphane Querrec

Raqs Media Collective

Martha Rosler

Hito Steyerl

Mitra Tabrizian

WochenKlausur

Paolo Woods

Film Lounge

Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler

Jeremy Deller & Mike Figgis

Marcelo Exposito & Nuria Vila

Yevginy Fiks

Christos Georgiou

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Ernest Larsen & Sherry Millner

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Gregory Sholette is an artist and writer whose publications include *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture* (2010), *It's the Political Economy, Stupid!*, co-edited with Oliver Ressler (2013), as well as *Collectivism After Modernism*, co-edited with Blake Stimson (2007) and *The Interventionists*, co-edited with Nato Thompson (2004). Recent solo exhibitions include *Our Barricades* in October 2014 at Station Independent Gallery in New York City and his participatory project *Imaginary Archive*, which travelled to Kyiv, Ukraine in the spring

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Acknowledgements

As editors of this volume, we remain deeply grateful to all contributing authors, the ideas of whom also nourished the curatorial project ECONOMY (Scotland 2013) which this publication builds on, queries and extends. We are also indebted to the artists whose work was featured in the two parallel ECONOMY exhibitions and screening programmes. We are thankful to History of Art at Edinburgh University for its consistent support of the broader project as well as the book, and the Carnegie Institute for Scottish Universities for its financial assistance with the images. The many funders of the curatorial project ECONOMY (www.economyexhibition.net) have included: University of Edinburgh, Stills, Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow), Association of Art Historians, Creative Scotland, The Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, FRAME, Glasgow Life, Finnish Institute in London, Goethe Institute Glasgow, Arts Council of Finland and The Nancie Massey Charitable Trust. We wish to express our gratitude for their support.

We would like to thank our families for their incredible practical help and for being so patient with our frequent late-night calls and occasional panic attacks; and our friends, in many countries, for boosting our courage and helping us connect our writings with life getting on as usual or, sometimes, not.

Finally, we wish to thank each other for sharing a process of genuine thinking together and dialogical learning that is, in our experience, hard to find. The book is dedicated to our friend, student and colleague at Edinburgh, art historian Jenny Gypaki (1981–2013), whose daily critique of capitalism and faith in art, as the book was in progress, made our long working hours feel worthwhile as much as her sense of humour made them bearable and, dare we say, even fun. We miss her, we will carry on.

Introduction: ‘The Last Instance’ – The Apparent Economy, Social Struggles and Art in Global Capitalism

Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd

The economy: what kind of struggle?

When we approached political theorist Massimo De Angelis as a potential contributor to this volume, he proposed ‘the economy is struggle’ as a possible chapter title. This affirmation resonated strongly with both the initial hypothesis that motivated us to undertake the curatorial project ECONOMY and the lessons we learned from it, upon the completion of its first round of events in 2013. This initial hypothesis concerned developments in art and could be summarised as follows: the ideological triumph of neoliberalism, following the precipitous demise of Soviet state-socialism circa 1990 and the consolidation of global capitalism, introduced a radical consciousness in contemporary art practice and theory which focused on economic relations. This meant a prioritisation of materiality over textuality, action (and often activism) over discourse, relationships over fragmentation, observed reality over appropriation, biopolitics over micropolitics; and so this new consciousness undermined the principles of a postmodern visual-arts idiom, ultimately signalling the latter’s abandonment. This extraordinary interest in economic relations required charting, analysis and explication, as it constituted an unexpected yet defining feature of radical art practice and theory between the 1990s and the 2010s, extending to the present. The ECONOMY exhibition project, organised by the editors of this volume, began this process using curatorial methodologies. Over 30 artworks marked by these tendencies were displayed across two venues – Stills, Scotland’s Centre

for Photography in Edinburgh and the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow – between January and April 2013. A new ‘interventionist’ commission by the Austrian collective WochenKlausur accompanied the gallery presentations together with film screenings, public forums and online debates, all responding to seven keywords that guided our curatorial research: work, sex, life, enclosures, crisis, spectres, exodus.

Yet, as these keywords suggest, the heightened visibility of the economy was not exclusive to art but rather a notable social phenomenon of the early twenty-first century. Since 2008, the year when global capitalism became registered in terms of a global financial crisis, we have had the opportunity to observe and experience a more general articulation of the economy as struggle – North, South, East and West. We witnessed concentrated, riotous discontent (think Turkey and Brazil in the summer of 2013 and events in the Arab world and North Africa over the past five years); resurrected and modernised fascism induced by economic policies (think Golden Dawn in post-IMF Greece, though xenophobic UKip in Britain is certainly more successful in dividing an international/European working class); neo-colonial projects shaking formal transnationalisms (the Eurozone springs to mind); the legitimisation and globalisation of a ‘creditors’ culture (leading to the paralysis of the US government in October 2013); boosted nationalisms in the hope that smaller populations can better be protected against markets, economic ‘storms’ and scarcity (Scotland and too many others to mention); and, recently, in 2014, a media-popular rhetoric of capitalism’s ‘recovery’ from the crisis, explicitly used to restore the public’s confidence in property relations and undermine the political relevance of seeking out alternatives. This rhetoric implicitly sees a natural, and hence unavoidable, event rather than systemically reproduced economic torture in the thousands of people risking death while trafficked from ‘poor’ Africa to ‘affluent’ Europe (Shenker 2013). In this context, observing the close exchange between art and life became a sad historical ‘privilege’: contemporary art’s originally tentative, but eventually firm, prioritisation of an economic subject matched an everyday of deep uncertainty as we learned to adapt and survive in a predatory economy of cuts, debt (disciplining students and sovereign states), welfare extinction and GDP ups and downs that fail to translate into social well-being. And so, even as we can now confidently make the assertion that the economy *is* a form of struggle, the urgency of the question ‘what kind of struggle?’ remains undiminished. This edited volume is intended as a contribution to current, trans-disciplinary debates pertaining to the ways we struggle in,

and through, the economy and, in particular, to the forms this struggle assumes in art practice and theory.

The essays collected here involve, and go beyond, art as a historically determined site for social action. This choice is consistent with the curatorial method we assumed for *ECONOMY* but also responds to the double expansion of both economy and art, as discrete yet interwoven fields. The global financial crisis which followed the ‘unthinkable’ collapse of Lehman Brothers in the USA in 2008 merely intensified already existent, spiralling biopolitical effects that introduced the economy as concretely embedded into lived experience – even, or especially, when it was apparent that so-called ‘lived experience’ was an ideological experience (determined by internalised, naturalised values and so on), as Louis Althusser had contended (Althusser 1971b [1966], 223). For a few years now, articles in the national and international press have been stressing the devastating impact of economic policies across the board while books with ominous titles like *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills* (2013) have sought to describe the social truth of unhinged neoliberal dogma.¹ A collaboration between David Stuckler, an Oxford-based sociologist, and Sanjay Basu, a Stanford-based medical doctor, this is a startling analysis of the catastrophic consequences of austerity, which, in Greece alone, saw a 52 per cent rise in HIV, a doubling in suicide, a rising number of murders and the return of malaria (Stuckler and Basu 2013, xiv). Meanwhile, at the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, a psychology magazine reports on recent research into the ‘pain of privilege’: increased rates of anxiety, depression and self-harm among relatively wealthy teenagers in the USA.² These examples, and many others like them, attest to this fact: the very visibility, pressures and turbulence of the economy today has meant that research concerning the social meaning and impact of economic relations is no longer carried out just by economists. The biopower of twenty-first-century capitalism is at the heart of this development.

Social anthropologist Athena Athanasiou and philosopher Judith Butler have discussed the increased instances of suicide prompted by contemporary subjects’ feeling of entrapment in economic relations, drawing a connection with other instances of the self-punishing of the body as a form of protest (Athanasiou and Butler 2013). Athanasiou speaks of

1 See ‘Austerity Measures’ Effect on Health and Homelessness’ (11 June 2013). www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22858944 (accessed 2 July 2013).

2 www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201310/the-problem-rich-kids (accessed 13 June 2013).

‘the need to think how relational and corporeal forms of street politics emerged as a result of people’s exposure to, and resistive engagement with, pervasive forms of socially assigned disposability’ (145). And yet how the economy is to be addressed in discourses that remain sensitive to the vicissitudes of post-Cold War capitalism is a matter that divides rather than unites. For example, we see a risk in Athanasiou’s contention that ‘neoliberalism is not primarily a form of economic management, but rather a political rationality and mode of governmental reasoning that both constructs and manages the realm to be regulated’ (149–50). The displacement from the economic to the political significantly obscures the *actual* conditions in which an austerity-hit, impoverished pensioner commits suicide so that he does not become a financial burden to his children. This case, from the recent pantheon of economic martyrs, is discussed by Athanasiou and Butler, alongside similar acts of economic despair that articulate contemporary forms of dispossession. What we want to consider are the links between a pensioner who kills himself in public view to protest against the economic policies that destroyed his life, a bowling alley manager who locks himself in a cage during his work breaks and an artist who records herself dispassionately reciting her salary, living circumstances and weight, her pauses punctuated by the sound of canned laughter. The last two instances refer to artworks included in the ECONOMY exhibition: Dani Marti’s *Good Dog* (2012) documents an employee’s intense frustrations and self-loathing as he attempts to stage a temporary, sexualised, escape by pretending to be a dog, while Kai Kaljo’s renowned video *Loser* (1997) succinctly captures her apparent failures as both an artist and a woman, experiences which are consonant with those of the growing global ‘precariat’. In the biopolitics of contemporary capitalism despair has many shades, as does the internalisation and externalisation of humiliation. We therefore wish to understand what is at stake in the following assertion:

I have no doubt that ‘economy’ is today a diffuse, insidious, and powerful interpellation through which subjects (and non-subjects) are called into formation and reformulation. But I would argue that the current historical moment is not merely about the economy *itself* (if such a thing exists), and, even more significantly, economy is not about merely the economic ‘itself’. Perhaps one might reformulate this caveat thus: there is nothing merely economic about economics. (Athanasiou, in Athanasiou and Butler 2013, 39; emphasis in text)

The expressed doubt, ‘if such a thing exists’, may on some level undermine

the authority of orthodox economics – the effectively neoliberal discourse dealing with the ‘thing’.³ But, on another and more important level, the expressed doubt is co-opted within this tradition’s salient outcome: a mode of production and reproduction where all aspects of life are subject to the domination of capitalist economic relations, or else the current impossibility of differentiating between ‘economy’ and ‘life’, ‘economy’ and ‘health’, ‘economy’ and ‘education’, or, for that matter, between ‘economy’ and ‘art’. This is the case when we speak about the planet’s ecology, since the way in which human society becomes productive engages directly and impacts on the environment. It is simply impossible to think about ecology and art without thinking about the economy (Araeen 2009). The online project *On Radical Ecology and Tender Gardening* (2011, ongoing), which Johan Grimonprez presented both as part of the exhibition and via the associated website, is a vast and multi-layered archive of responses to conditions imposed by capital’s very address to nature as a ‘resource’.⁴ Significantly, such responses range from the complicit-entrepreneurial to the oppositional-anticapitalist, suggesting the always *ideological* meaning of ‘radical’. In short, the current visibility of the economy is *not* an effect of a discourse that unfolds exclusively on the Left.

This fact – the ideological interpretation of economic relations, the plural claims on ‘what is to be done?’ which nevertheless all coalesce around an economic axis – is the reason why we selected ‘economy’ rather than ‘capitalism’ as the title of the curatorial project at large and as the title of this book, despite our politically motivated emphasis on anti-capitalist critique in the positions presented. Without rushing to any facile conclusions about an imminent post-capitalist future (let alone pockets of such a post-capitalist present!), in *ECONOMY* we wished to acknowledge the *historically specific* concentration of struggles focusing on economic relations, sharing Maurizio Lazzarato’s belief that ‘the modern notion of “economy” covers both economic production and the production of subjectivity’ (Lazzarato 2012, 11). Therefore, the thesis that ‘there is nothing merely economic about economics’ finds us in agreement, and, indeed, *ECONOMY* entailed an effort to present how

3 Naomi Klein has traced the dominance of Chicago School economics and discussed the repercussions of this for shaping both capitalist ideology and policies at the turn of the twenty-first century. See Klein 2008.

4 See the project website: www.johangrimonprez.com/main/Web_RADICAL_ECOLOGY_01_01.html.

contemporary art has responded to this realisation. More specifically, we sought to understand why art did so at a specific moment in time and in the history of capitalism.

That said, it is certainly not the case that art negotiated the meaning of this realisation only *after* 2008. If there is ‘a particular tendency to privilege and reify the category of the “economy” in light of the current financial crisis’ (Athanasίου and Butler 2013, 38), a closer attention to developments in the field of contemporary art both as practice and theoretical investigation can provide a corrective lens. Among the earlier examples included in the ECONOMY exhibition were Rick Lowe’s *Project Row Houses*, a durational, highly localised, artwork-cum-social enterprise which began tackling the effects of economic inequalities in 1993, Andreas Gursky’s monumental photograph of a cacophonous trading pit, *Chicago Board of Trade II* (1999), Angela Melitopoulos’s *CORRIDOR X* (2006), a video essay which presents a history of migration from the east to the west of Europe as a major factor in Western Europe’s economic stability, and Tanja Ostojić’s *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05), a highly personalised document of the artist’s quest to make the same transition to the ‘right side of capitalism’ (this time through marriage). In this sense, then, ECONOMY as a curatorial endeavour and this collection of theoretical reflections both partake in a *periodisation of contemporary art* that may, hopefully, hold meaning for a broader understanding of contemporary capitalism’s socio-economic terrain. At the time of writing, contemporary art is about fifty years old: a ‘love child’ of the restless, youth-oriented and revolutionary-minded 1960s, yes, but how did it subsequently develop, and why? In short, we place this effort to grasp a paradigm shift in contemporary art within the collective and trans-disciplinary effort to understand what kind of struggle global capital and processes of resistance shape at present.

If there is nothing merely economic about economics, there is also nothing merely art historical about the art history of the contemporary, as shaped by the contemporary itself. In support of this claim, our introductory chapter goes on to consider: (a) how economic relations become relevant to the re-articulation of ‘the contemporary’ in recent art; (b) the search for a legitimising discourse in contemporary art following the deflation of identity politics; (c) the significance of Louis Althusser’s emphasis on the economy as the ‘last instance’ for shaping a legitimising discourse for contemporary art after identity politics; (d) the problems hindering the theoretical representation of a second phase of contemporary art; and (e) contemporary art as a terrain of

production where Marx's 'forces of production' tend to be incorporated into 'relations of production'. Our chapter concludes with this particular verdict on production because of the historical specificity it lends to the positions presented in this volume and to encourage further research into *how* whatever we understand by 'art' transforms when production does.

Re-articulating the contemporary through art: production and subjects

A primary aim of this volume has been to gather evidence in support of the proposition that the discourse on, and of, contemporary art has undergone an important change. One possible starting point is the exponential growth over the past decade of the number of exhibitions and events which have highlighted various aspects of art's response to an expanded economic field. Most of these exhibitions, projects and discursive events focused on labour and work relations but other subjects were brought forth as well: for example, the exhibition *Lapdogs of the Bourgeoisie* (London 2007) raised the question of class, largely forgotten in Western art history until a few years ago, while *It's the Political Economy, Stupid!* (New York 2010, and touring) addressed specifically how the global financial crisis is represented in art and theory.⁵ *Parallel to ECONOMY, Love Is Colder than Capital* (Bregenz 2013) concentrated on how art tackles an increasingly troubling subject: neoliberalism's appropriation of emotions for private economic profit. Nicolas Bourriaud's *Commerce in Paris* in 1994; Suzana Milevska's *Capital & Gender* in Skopje in 2000; WHW's 2009 Istanbul Biennial *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, which took its cue from Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*; the series of workshops and publication *Work, work, work!* in Stockholm in 2010; all these along with numerous others attest to the fact that there has been a profound shift in art's critical lexicon. Whereas before the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, identity politics exemplified a progressive political consciousness in the art world, the very (ecumenical) visibility of capitalism since the dismantling of the Eastern bloc and China's consolidation in the capitalist markets has generated a political consciousness centred on an economic subject. There has been an intensifying and sustained attendance to the economic in art and curatorial thinking that appears to underwrite shorter-lived, though no

5 In connection with these two exhibitions, see Haq and Zolghadr 2010; Sholette and Ressler 2013.

less historically determined, revivals and returns (such as the occasional retreat to 'the object', 'the figure' and so on).⁶ Notably, in confronting the maze of economic relations, artists have been investigating anything from the link between precarity and the so-called creative class to histories of economic obsolescence to the fascination with 'community' as the cradle of a post-capitalist imaginary; methodologically, they have been elaborating sobering and often unsettling participatory aesthetics as much as rebellious counter-appropriations of pedagogy. The latter has been set against the commercialisation and bureaucratisation of the university as a post-Fordist factory (though, we would argue, with evident Fordist elements).⁷

Among all of these tendencies and trends, the emphatic emergence of documentary and post-documentary sensibilities and methodologies in contemporary art (notably, in ways that go beyond the political identities of artists who practise them) signals the depth and complexity of the shifts underway. Since the turn of the century curators and theorists have highlighted art's new commitment to the production and distribution of information, whether compensating for the 'blind spots' of mainstream journalism or simply adopting its tropes (Cramerotti 2009; Steyerl 2010). An alternative regime of knowledge production is seen to be in play that crosses from art and curating to activism and theory. Yet, as Boris Groys observed, documentary modes are deployed not only to map and analyse social realities but as part and parcel of projects which broker new types of engagements between art and life (Groys 2002). Social documents can therefore present devastating visual reports which relate the tar sand enterprises in Canada's boreal forest to the flood-stricken regions of Bangladesh as in Ursula Biemann's video essay *Deep Weather* (2012). Alternatively, they can confront the viewer with highly complex artworks, returning to the institution evidence and traces of a durational art/life project enacted elsewhere. Examples of this latter tendency would include the correspondence, photographs, certificates and video which together narrate Tanja Ostojić's failed attempt at gaining privileged (here German) citizenship, or the snapshots and abridged report which present

6 On the political meaning of the figurative in twentieth-century art, see the classic essay by Benjamin Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting' (Buchloh 1981). On the recent uses of the philosophical current known as speculative realism for a return to the studio and the object, see Bromberg 2013.

7 Regarding the appropriateness of the metaphor of the factory for focusing struggles in education, see Kelly 2013; also Raunig 2013.

the story of WochenKlausur's *Participatory Economics* (2013), a project which set out to establish a worker self-managed cooperative with local residents from the Drumchapel area of Glasgow.⁸ Our contention is that rather than still inhabiting the postmodern paradigm of Hal Foster's 'artist as ethnographer' (Foster 1996), these artworks – alongside many others – indicate a move towards radically updating Walter Benjamin's 'author as producer' (Benjamin 1936): the artist as producer of knowledge and information, of care, of empowerment was typically present in most works in ECONOMY. Yet in so far as this new artist-as-producer emerges *after* the undisputed hegemony of industrial capitalism, how and for whom this new producer produces in the early twenty-first century requires research, documentation, analysis and a form of political contextualisation that establishes a dialectic between art as a field of political contestation and actually existing relations of production.

We are not of course arguing that the current phase of capitalism does not rely on consumption and hence on a pervasive consumer culture. Rather, we recognise that substantive changes in production and consumption have taken place. These changes are amply demonstrated when our fascination with communicating our identities leads to Facebook entering the stock market, much like an industry that relies on productive labour; or when the struggles of Western workers in the 'postmodern' decades of the 1970s and 1980s led to industries migrating to pastures of cheaper labour; or when the Brazilian people rebel against the consumption of football spectacle and protest in their millions for lower transport fares; or, indeed, when we (once the 'viewers') get paid, or not, by artists to co-produce artworks as 'experiences' that we simultaneously consume. The blurring of boundaries between consumption and production in art and social media has been just one effect of an expanded field of production.

Consequently, we were not surprised to see that many of the contributions to this volume centre on arguments which involve what we might call *the state of production relations* in contemporary capitalism as much as in contemporary art. The connection pursued by Andrea Phillips between art and ownership, John Roberts' elucidation of the problems endemic in the concept of immaterial labour (ultimately, the fact that it hides aspects of production that remain central to the reproduction of capitalism), Marina Vishmidt's reflections on the entwining of art and finance utilising speculation, Angela Dimitrakaki's

8 See the artists' website: www.wochenklausur.at (accessed 11 September 2014).

attendance to women artists' sexualised labour in biopolitical art practice at present – all call attention to the need for understanding the inseparability of art production from production at large. Art's purported 'difference' and 'exemption' from the general predicament of production, when appropriated and made to 'work' for capital, are no longer a given. Alberto Toscano's historical detour to the first half of the twentieth century serves to remind us that this is indeed *not* the first time when aesthetics and the economy coalesce, fuelling always, and evidently, historically specific desires to 'see socialism' at the exit-point of the (capitalist) tunnel. And yet, the questions posed by Toscano in relation to the 1920s and 1930s, on the 'representability of capital' and on 'the intelligibility of transition', remain open and supremely relevant as capital reorganises production on a planetary scale today, a hundred years later. These questions, involving terms such as 'crisis', 'labour', 'transparency' and so on, conclude the volume's Part I on production, from where we proceed, in Part II, to an examination of the subjects that economic relations shape at present.

This return to the question of subjectivity addresses an observed reality but also stresses the need for a courageous imagination. The latter is required both for Greg Sholette's call to consolidate the Occupy movement spirit to the art world as leading to a new artistic, or even *post-artistic*, subject (an outrageous proposition, given the now globalised ideological dominance of the artist as entrepreneur) and Melanie Gilligan's ruthless dramatisation of capital as an archi-subject, abstract but materially effective, irrational but ultimately making rational choices relating to production. Presented as a five-screen installation in ECONOMY, Gilligan's *Popular Unrest* (2010) offered a chillingly incisive narrativisation of cross-class co-optation into sustaining the dominance of abstraction as the dominance of capital. Her interview in this volume is intended to elaborate on art's role in explicating (rather than just being made out of) economy. In an exemplary connective analysis, Renate Lorenz traces the imbrication of the division of labour and sexuality, revealing unexpected layers in the formation of the sexed subject but also boldly assigning class a central position in a queer imaginary. Lorenz collaborated with Pauline Boudry to produce *Normal Work* (2007), a film-and-photography installation included in ECONOMY and shown not too far from Gilligan's futuristic account. To this, *Normal Work* added an archive-based reinterpretation of a past where economic relations gave rise to complex subjectivities and desires. Yet what Lorenz shares with Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos's theorisation of the subject

in an age dominated by precarity and a migratory labour force is the emphasis on possibilities of self-empowerment *within* an existent order of labour division. Kirsten Lloyd's consideration of the 'ethical delirium' that has apparently beset both contemporary life and art positions the caring artist–subject in the light of affective labour, outsourced intimacy and the commercialisation of feelings. What becomes of art and ethics when love is the 'new gold' (Hochschild 2002)? Massimo De Angelis closes the volume with an illuminating (and, to an extent, cautionary) exposition on the potential of the commons to offer subjects direct access to alternative means and ways of life.

Economy: the legitimising discourse for art after postmodernism

The chapters in this volume thus achieve a particular approach to the contemporary – an approach best described as a search for contexts where the *social role* of economic relations becomes apparent. Such a centrality of the economy was not the case during the 1970s and 1980s, a time identified with the rise of postmodernism. Identity politics, or what Hal Foster called a 'cultural subject' (Foster 1996), dominated the period's imagination and provided its battleground. We seek to analyse what happened to the subject *after* postmodernism, to define a framework for research explaining why the transfer of economic relations into the social field (where the binaries public/private and production/subjectivity are rooted) has intensified to such a conspicuous degree in the past twenty years – a timeframe, we note, when 'globalisation' became a colloquial term.

Whereas obituaries of postmodernism have occasionally appeared at least since the publication, in 1990, of a *New York Times* article (Kipnis 2005, 372), there has been a reluctance to think why this has been the case. It is almost as if the Left was so relieved to be rid of the conceptual hegemony of the postmodern that it proceeded to perform a Lacanian foreclosure: a wilful suppression of a troubling 'incident' (postmodernism) in the history of labour's conflict with capital. To give one example, in 2002, Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta II*, the first grand-scale show about globalisation's demographics of misery, merely sought to disassociate the postcolonial subject from postmodernism, as if abandoning a sinking ship. In claiming a leading role for the postcolonial subject in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's multitude (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2005), Enwezor (2002) did not consider the role reserved for this multitude in the global re-structuring of production. This role was to displace the

traditional proletariat as the truly productive subject of modernity and replace it with a productive *class* of networks and alliances manned (*sic*) by service workers.

Hardt and Negri's vision was powerful but unconvincing for many – especially for feminists also drawing on Italian Autonomia, such as Silvia Federici (2010), who charged the masterminds of the multitude's current hyper-visibility with disavowing a persistently gendered division of labour in the global regime of production.⁹ Unlike Enwezor, though, Federici understood that the multitude *cannot* have privileged subjects, be they women or the formerly colonised (both were ushered *en masse* into the globalised service economy of cheap, precarised labour or offered the role of surplus populations running informal economies). Grasping this aspect of contemporaneity is particularly important, if unaccounted for in the art history addressing the contemporary moment. It is perhaps one reason why Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos, in this volume, stress the value of 'imperceptible politics', of painfully slow yet real processes of subject empowerment in conditions of labour adversity. We find their concept of 'embodied capitalism' acutely useful in capturing the continuous centrality of materiality, of the 'body', in the reproduction of diverse and uneven positions as a response to capital-controlled relations of production. However, we are keen *not* to see 'imperceptible politics' as a step further down the ladder of postmodern micropolitics. For the bodies that actualise an embodied capitalism hardly succumb to the fantasy of a fragmented social body, of incommensurate and even antagonistic social projects, as what binds them together is the universal condition of precarity and labour. *This* is the metanarrative of capital's globalisation.

Contrary to the above authors' proposition, which builds on the feminist anatomy of the everyday, Nicolas Bourriaud's 2009 Tate Triennial offered the big picture of 'altermodernity', a conception which invested, unexpectedly and disappointingly, in the staples of a postmodern idiom privileging 'cultural translation' and multiple, and

9 Italian Autonomia, also encountered as Operaism (from the Italian word *opere*, meaning 'worker') and/or Italian Marxism, emerged in Italy in the 1960s. This was a revolutionary Marxist movement, the theoretical innovations of which have become particularly resonant with anti-capitalist and Marxist thinking in globalisation from the 1990s onwards. Crucially, the theoretical innovations of Italian Autonomia included feminist thinking (as indeed is discussed in several chapters in this volume). There is a growing bibliography on the subject, including Sandro Mezzara's short essay 'Italy, Operaism and post-Operaism' (in Ness 2009).

equally valued, points of entry. Here 'globalisation became identified with a homogeneous *cultural* space (and the possibility of cosmopolitanism)' at a time when 'the widening gap between haves and have-nots identifies globalisation with an increasingly heterogeneous, that is, wildly uneven, *economic* space' (Dimitrakaki 2012, 307; emphasis added). Yet the value of Bourriaud's formulation was his bringing forth of a *totality*: globalisation. This overcoming of the fear of totality is a powerful indicator that postmodernism is, as put in Bourriaud's manifesto, dead (Bourriaud 2009). The issue that then arises is: what comes after? In announcing postmodernism's death, Bourriaud invites nothing less than a project of finding what Paul Crowther once called a new 'legitimising discourse' for art in his defence of art's right to exist and evolve after modernism (Crowther 1993).

We propose that postmodernism can now be rethought as contemporary art's first phase, a period built upon the experiments undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s by, and responding to, emergent historical conditions. Put differently, this legitimising discourse for Phase II of contemporary art became a possibility when a generation's political unconscious, to borrow Fredric Jameson's famous formulation (Jameson 1986), could no longer ignore *the confrontation of capital and labour*. 'Generation' is here intended as a descriptor of a massified subject inhabiting a historical era, a subject that embodies the new norms of production rather than demonstrating a political awareness of *how* it produces, and so a subject that refers us to the active construction of contemporaneity (rather than denoting an age group). And yet there is a new confidence in numbers: we can witness a *critical mass* of acting subjects on the horizon of art as a social practice. There are other distinguishing features of contemporary art's second phase, springing up across chapters in this volume. For example, the recent departure from visuality: does it make sense still to talk about the 'visual arts' given that interventionist or service-oriented practices are not designed to be mounted on walls or pedestals? Or radical art's parenthetical crossing through aesthetics. If postmodernist art sought to be 'anti-aesthetic' (Foster 1983), much radical art in capitalist globalisation sees aesthetics as an irrelevant diversion before the urgency of circumstances: social documents, active citizenship, interventionist pragmatism, oppositional pedagogies, the possibility of solidarity – all appear to be far more important than the 'for or against aesthetics' question.

This question of 'the contemporary' as a descriptive cultural marker has generated a flurry of publications, conferences and articles in

recent years.¹⁰ Terry Smith's sustained engagement with the subject has included the organisation of a symposium at the University of Pittsburgh in 2004 focused around the following provocation: 'In the aftermath of modernity, and the passing of the postmodern, how are we to know and show what it is to live in the conditions of contemporaneity?' (Smith 2009, 1). His later attempt to identify an 'aesthetics of globalization' under these conditions acknowledges the role of capitalist economic relations not only in terms of the proliferation of 'Spectacle Art', biennials and the concentration of power within commercial or multinational art institutions, but in terms of the small-scale, interactive and communicative offerings which 'seek sustainable flows of survival, cooperation and politics' (8). Yet some of his most striking insights on the features which distinguish contemporary art from its modern and postmodern predecessors concern the reconfigured role of the viewer, whom he identifies as a *classed subject*. Recognising the level of resources required to partake in the experience economies of current art, he considers the impact this has on the field of contemporary art history itself where the successful historian must replicate the conditions of contemporary markets, circuiting the globe to witness exhibitions and events first-hand.

While Smith's assertion that the limits of postmodern thinking have been reached led him to seek new ways to grasp the considerable cultural shifts which, post-1989, have ushered in 'the contemporary', Peter Osborne has described contemporary art as post-conceptual (Osborne 2013, 10). Though he retains art theory's reductive attention to form, we nevertheless appreciate his commitment to differentiating between art and aesthetics. This he sees as pertinent to the project of understanding the contemporary in art, in one of the most exciting philosophical negotiations of the subject (of art) in recent years. But we want to interrogate what he calls the 'two constitutive aspects of contemporary art, as an art of contemporaneity in a global context' and indeed in 'a transnational globality': '*the fictionalization of artistic authority and the collectivization of artistic fictions*' (Osborne 2013, 15; emphasis in the text). An example of the former would be two artists assuming the name Claire Fontaine whose participation in the ECONOMY exhibition involved the free distribution of canvas tote bags bearing the message 'Capitalism Kills Love'. Here, the fictionalisation of artistic authority deliberately addresses

10 Foster 2009; 'What is Contemporary Art? Issue One'; 'What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two'.

changes in capitalist production: Claire Fontaine is a female name and so points to a (singular) female producer of art. It is also the name of a popular brand of French stationery, a rather tangible and widely available commodity of industrial production. The appropriation of a corporate moniker by a male–female art collective engaged in tactics of communication long identified with capitalist marketing (bags carried by people today typically function as advertising space for corporations’ logos) is a symbolic act. It is also a mildly subversive act, reminding us who, and for what purpose, constantly exercises a right to authorship: the corporation, for profit. The company logo is the site where the fictionalisation of authority that comes with authorship is articulated: both authority and authorship belong to capital, not those whose labour produces the logo and the products it markets. The fictionalisation of *artistic* authorship and authority is therefore merely a replication of a capitalist *form*. As such, it signals an aspect of the contemporary at large but it does not explain a broader rethinking of priorities in contemporary art.

Osborne’s privileging of the ‘collectivization of artistic fiction’ is possibly undermined by the very example he uses, The Atlas Group, a fictional collective and ‘label’ of Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad. First of all, the ambiguity of authorship (whether collective or not) is pivotal to the work itself, in precisely the same way that the documents in their/his ‘archives’ quickly unravel into a set of peculiar imaginary constructs, deliberately riven by blind alleys and blatant contradictions. But, more importantly, perhaps, for the fiction of authorship to work, what must be presupposed in the first instance is a very rigid separation between artist and public. Osborne appears to expect the public to encounter ‘the artist’, here posing as a collective, as a name on a caption next to ‘their’ work or under an image included in a book. Yet the fiction of the collective collapses as soon as the public happens to attend a talk given by ‘The Atlas Group’: in the contemporary art world, the current incarnation of the exhibition form is almost never limited to a display of objects. Rather, it has been expanded to incorporate workshops, conferences, guided tours, performative events and so on (Dimitrakaki 2012), thereby frequently bringing the artist into the presence of the ‘viewers’. The situation is further complicated by increasingly sophisticated viewing habits – on this topic Jan Verwoert has pointed to Henry Jenkins’s notion of ‘double viewing’ whereby spectators are able simultaneously to apprehend the artificiality of the construct while emotionally engaging with the ‘reality’ of the situation before them, holding belief and disbelief in a state of sustained tension (Verwoert 2003, 27). In addition

to the formal and conceptual gaps that litter the archive's materials, in his performative lectures, Raad switches between presenting himself as a representative of the group and plainly clarifying that the project (and its collective membership) is imaginary: the construct of this collective is far from a stable given. We find it therefore much more useful to look at how artworks, such as those produced by the Atlas Group or, say, WochenKlausur (where collectivisation does not entail fiction, though it entails a fluctuating mass of artists, maybe up to 80 at any given time) articulate contemporaneity *by what artistic labour reveals about the state and conditions of production*.

On the 'last instance' or the state of production

In the early 1960s, long before 'globalisation' entered theoretical and everyday speech but as contemporary art was emerging, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser defined the hidden substratum of the economy as the lonely hour of the last instance that never claims the stage:

Here then are the two ends of the chain: the economy is determinant, but *in the last instance* [...] in the long run, the run of History. But History 'asserts itself' through the multiform world of the superstructures. From local tradition to international circumstance [...] This overdetermination [...] is *universal*; the economic dialectic is never active *in the pure state*; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc. – are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes. (Althusser 1965, unpaginated; emphasis in the text)

The economic consciousness, which, we contend, is manifest in the art of the present, puts some strain on this statement. The economy has taken a phenomenological turn: it has become explicit, and ubiquitously so, rupturing the basis-superstructure form where 'basis' corresponds to a *normatively* hidden economic foundation upon which the edifice of culture, the 'superstructure', sits. Of course, Althusser would consider this claim an anathema and a form of historicism that ignores the permanence, or indeed absoluteness, of the structures he sought to elucidate. For Althusser ascribes to the economic 'base' a function very

close to that of the unconscious in psychoanalysis: it is never meant to appear but only to influence, like a puppet master, from behind the scenes. Yet we are compelled to think historically at present, if we are not to succumb to capitalist essentialism, rather than 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009). We have no means of knowing, let alone proving, whether the economy has always been, and will always and *necessarily* be, the hidden foundation (for that, in our opinion, would mean to essentialise history). What we register is that the biopolitical rule that accompanies the globalisation of capital has made the economy apparent. It is capital, in its specific historical configuration, which produces this economic reductionism. It is capital that has achieved globalisation as a levelling effect: a levelling of the ground, so to speak, where we observe the swelling of the economy as a determinant that spills over, and through, all currently *horizontalised* aspects of the former 'superstructure'. This *apparentness* of the economy is what defines both art and the social body at present. A salient feature of the state of production, this apparentness has often turned economic relations into contemporary art's 'theme'.

Yet the apparentness of the economy is not merely a matter of capital's geographical spread. Premised on an epistemological paradigm and privileging a Newtonian (i.e., material) space (at first sight), globalisation is a process of completion to which Hardt and Negri gave the name Empire, distinguishing it from the former imperialisms that paved the way. But geographical completion is only one aspect of what coincides with Phase II of contemporary art. For globalisation is, of course, a *geopolitical* reality of ownership, where the latter acquires extremely, or even unfathomably, complicated forms: no one knows what corporations own any more and where the last piece of the domino stands, or even if the domino continues to be an apt metaphor for the schematisation of neo-capitalist models of ownership (on this see Andrea Phillips' chapter in this volume). This is what the Lehman Brothers financial services firm's collapse demonstrated to the world, and not just to economists. This is what becomes clear when you buy a bottle of organic fruit juice and the small print on the bottle tells you it is a Coca-Cola product. It is impossible to trace the movement of money and the intricacies of accounting. And so, arguably, real-world politics (that practised by national governments and transnational organisations of governance) curiously only engage in micropolitics, implementing forms of temporary, incomplete, site/region-specific management. But the apparentness of the economy, the now-revealed last instance, is also intelligible in the constitution of the subject and inter-subjective

interactions. It is what Brian Massumi, at the opening of contemporary art's Phase II, identified as the failure of democracy in capitalism: 'every body's "free choice" to delegate its becoming in return for "living out" its "productive life" in the despotism it most desires' (Massumi 1992, 125). What matters to capital is that a productive life is lived, and certainly *embodied*. This is why a Foucauldian approach to biopolitics carries such weight at present.¹¹

On biopolitics and the lingering postmodern: what is a productive subject?

The Foucauldian formulation that 'power is a field of powers' (Negri 2008, 14) is, however, still drawn into the remains of postmodernism as ideology – indeed, in the Althusserian sense of a mediatory screen between reality and our apprehension of it. When we assert that postmodernism is over we mean that its *cultural hegemony* has been defeated (by history), not that it has evacuated *tout court* the scene of history where material conditions and ideologies collide. Indeed, the hypothesis that a part of contemporary art can be said to constitute an avant-garde, a militant formation engaged in practices of exposure and showing the way to some truth beyond the interpretation of subjective experience, is expressed as art's emphatic turn towards the signification of economic relations. Economy is the truth the current avant-garde exposes and targets. But we will return to this issue later. First, we wish to look at an example of this lingering, ideological postmodernism, as it is integral to the theoretical representation of the contemporary. Our example, strangely, is Antonio Negri.

In writing about the 'labor of the multitude', Negri explicitly connects it with 'a new postmodern political field' (Negri 2008, 13). The biopolitical aspects of the multitude's labour are, however, linked, for Negri, both with the seeping of capital's power into life – as perhaps particularly evident in the ability of capital to turn *bios* (directed, socially invested life) into *zoe* (life as a biological fact) – but also on the resistances that a biopolitical rule enables. We agree with Negri when he says: 'Once we have established that what we mean by biopolitics is a non-static, non-hypostatized process, a function of a moving history connected

11 The increasing volume of scholarship seeking to update Michel Foucault's conception of biopolitics includes indicatively entitled publications such as Binkley and Capetillo 2010; Lemm and Vatter 2014.

to a long process that brings the requirement of productivity to the center of the *dispositifs* of power, it is precisely that history that must be understood' (Negri 2008, 14–15). But we find ourselves less convinced by his assertion that 'biopolitics is therefore a contradictory context of/within life. By its very definition, it represents the extension of the economic and political contradiction over the entire social fabric, but it also represents the emergence of the *singularization* of resistances that permanently cut across it' (Negri 2008, 18; emphasis added). At least in 2014, such a singularisation of resistances appears to prioritise the singularity of events over the connective threads of the multitude's struggle. Negri asserts:

What seems important [...] is in effect the historical (also productive) concreteness of the constitution of the subject. The subject is productive: the production of subjectivity is thus a subjectivity that produces. Let us insist at present on the fact that the cause, the motor of this production of subjectivity, is found inside power relations, which is to say in the complex set of relationships that are nonetheless always traversed by a desire for life. However, to the extent that this desire for life signifies the emergence of a resistance to power, it is this resistance that becomes the genuine motor of production of subjectivity. (Negri 2008, 18)

The contradiction here is that the subject is described as fundamentally productive whereas power relations are reported to be indescribable and diffused. What Negri ignores is that if the subject is fundamentally productive *power relations will concentrate on production*, will specifically be exercised over, and internalised into, the capacity of the subject to produce. Or, for that matter, to reproduce. This is a salient lesson of feminist theory, which explains the historical subjugation of women's reproductive capacity into the economy, long before the advent of capitalism – the etymological meaning of economy being about the distribution, 'nome' [νομή], and regulation, 'nomos' [νόμος], of things/positions/power in the 'oikos' [οἶκος], or home. Yet, in 2014, feminists cannot travel back in time, to a moment of origin, and dismantle the first configuration of power relations that led to women's subjugation and entrapment in reproduction. What feminists can do is understand how women's subjugation is articulated in their historical moment, within the conditions shaped by the dominant mode of production. This is what the work of Tanja Ostojić, Andrea Fraser and Hito Steyerl included in *ECONOMY* showed: that a feminist consciousness in art practice is far

from trans-historical but rather devises work methods that identify what is *specific* to the articulation of a field of power that manufactures an exploitable, if resistive, female subject.¹²

The transformation of feminist consciousness in art practice from the 1970s to post-2000 globalisation is a sure indicator that something has changed in the regime of production. Which is why the ECONOMY exhibition ended up including slightly more female than male artists. However, the immense confidence in the rise of a creative regime of production, under the (alleged, but possibly true) hegemony of immaterial labour, encountered in Negri's thought, is both enabling and disabling when it comes to tracing the links between nodal points of contemporary production – say, a female university lecturer's office, the home where women produce children, a maquiladora on the border between Mexico and the USA where women workers assemble electronics. Negri claims:

The fact is that the surplus of living labor in relation to constant capital presents itself as production 'beyond measure' – that is to say, as 'outside' quantitative measurement – and it is in this that the difficulty forever reappears. Rather it is a production that goes *beyond* the idea of measure itself, that is to say, it ceases in reality to be defined as a negative passing of the limits of measurement to become simply – in an absolutely affirmative and positive manner – the power of living labor. This is how it becomes possible to foresee at least tendentially the end of exploitation. (Negri 2008, 21)

Perhaps now the reason we feminised our post-Fordist labouring subjects above becomes clearer. Negri assumes that a subject, however biopolitical the labour process he (*sic*) is engaged in, will just carry out *one* kind of labour. 'Living labour' continues to exclude reproductive labour in this formulation. Consequently, what happens when a woman is both a waged worker and an unwaged mother or housewife but whose productive capacities, on those two fronts, are nevertheless *central* to the reproduction of capitalism remains unaddressed. Indeed, the double work carried by women not only forces them back into a measure of time, where often they have to hire childcare for so many hours,

12 Tanja Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05); Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Documentation)* (2003–06), in which the artist records her sexual liaison with an art collector in an encounter arranged via her gallerist; Hito Steyerl's *Lovely Andrea* (2007), a documentary which deals with Japan's bondage industry where young women apparently have the chance to be, rather than have, it all, by becoming both worker and the commodity.

during which hours they work for wages, it also suggests that whatever uncaptured 'excess' and 'surplus' will be rescued from the process of waged labour will have to be invested, utterly absorbed, into the second productive regime of the home. If this were not the case, women would have found the energy and time for a revolution a long time ago.

And not only that: in the post-Fordist regime of production, which has come into full power during globalisation, the recombinant waged-unwaged productivity of women has been normalised and extended into entire professional fields. The field of art, where workers (be they artists, curators or anything else) are called to keep a job that provides them with (often non-living) wages and then work for nothing, performing 'a labour of love (for art)', is an adequate example and one pertinent to the aims of this volume. A more careful consideration therefore of what constitutes *feminised* production (rather than merely feminised labour) today would quickly curb any enthusiasm over the liberatory actuality of work – or what passes for 'non-work'. Capital has not intensified the attack on workers' wages, and therefore on the measurable value of labour, for nothing. The demise of the family wage, as feminists have pointed to (Weeks 2011), has been of paramount importance at least for our ideological conditioning as waged-cum-unwaged productive subjects.

The above remarks help to provide a framework for understanding why postmodernism is no longer enjoying its former cultural hegemony, at least in the field of art. Postmodernism reshaped the terrain of art in the 1970s and had its heyday in the 1980s. At that point, the women's movement had generated a confrontational feminism in art, one that promised a structural disarticulation of institutions and their regulatory mechanisms. The same can be said for postcolonial critique. The promise was never realised, for reasons that cannot even summarily be presented here. But what is important for our argument is that the mild reformist attitude towards, and *of*, the art institution by critical postmodernism pretty much prescribed the antinomies faced by radical artists today. In the final section of this Introduction we attempt a cursory outline of these conditions of production.

Class, struggle and avant-garde: from 'forces' to 'relations of production'

The economy is both the *site* and *form* of class struggle. This was a starting point for thinking about how art today engages the economy, having informed both our curatorial enquiry and the selection of research we

wished to see highlighted in this volume. Yet we are aware of there being many indications that class is being reconstituted in the accelerated manner received as 'crisis'. The debate on immaterial labour, to which several chapters in this volume contribute, is symptomatic of questions arising around class composition at present. Irrespective of one's position, this debate on 'immaterial labour' is a sign of its times. It is an eloquent reminder of the shift from 'consumption' to 'production' defining Phase II of contemporary art – that is, the re-activation of art *as living history*, which followed postmodernism's fascination with 'the end of'. This shift, marking postmodernism's demise, does not just reflect but is an integral part of a deeper and wider change in the current organisation of production overall.

Although some became aware just five years ago, in 2008, of capitalism concentrating its activity and energies on production, sociologists began to chart the impact of the rapid and extensive transformation of work, already evident in the mid-1990s, on subjectivity and intersubjective relations (see Sennett 1998; 2004; 2007). It is because of these widely felt changes that history appeared to have resumed a faster pace and possibilities surfaced – especially the possibility that interventions could be meaningful. The revived belief that art could be a platform for intervention in the social field helped bring about, among other things, the discourse on art as labour and the desire for imaginative leadership represented by the quest for a twenty-first-century avant-garde. Published in 2012, Marc James Léger's *Brave New Avant Garde* echoed the sentiments of many on the Left that the radical commitments of certain strands of art since the 1990s justified and permitted talk about an avant-garde – as also asserted by Roberts in this volume.

Significantly, both 'labour' and 'leadership' have been major issues in interdisciplinary research addressing the current phase of capitalism. Indeed, there has been an effort to avoid a 'capitalution' of either labour or leadership under the demands and identity of 'management', a concept and practice of salient importance for understanding the project of global capital. In anti-capitalist critique, management is clearly stigmatised as a tool and endpoint of capital's global operation. Management serves a purpose. In fact, management's purpose *is* to serve a purpose. Just as art's purpose, as we have been instructed by Kantian aesthetics, is not to serve a purpose. Therefore, management and art are opposites. They are not opposites in a trivial way – in a way that naively identifies art with infinite imagination and management with infinite application. They are opposites in a way that opens a rift within the terrain of labour, where at

present immaterial labour is seen as a *hegemonic, if not ubiquitous*, form (Michael Hardt, in Budgen and Colás 2003).

In critiquing immaterial labour, John Roberts' chapter in this volume directs us away from assuming an equivalence between any and all immaterial workers. As Roberts suggests, immaterial labour can encompass incredibly diverse labour sequences and forms incommensurate tasks – of which art is but one. To say that art is therefore part of the production regime where labour (often requiring a digital infrastructure) has become 'immaterial' reveals precious little about what kind of work art is. Roberts insists that what is important is that art be perceived as a 'gap' between the alleged freedom of the aesthetic and the compulsion of life that must be reproduced: art maintains its non-identity with both. Following on from Roberts, we would like to address his proposition, seeing art not as a gap between these two but rather as a *point of contact and collision*, an interface where the division (the non-identity) is painfully rather than triumphantly asserted. In any event, to assume the presence of an avant-garde presupposes a distinction between art and the productive labour that sustains life as a bundle of necessities. And what we wish to do here is to understand what the search for the legitimacy of this distinction entails in contemporary capitalism.

Our hypothesis is that to sustain such a distinction implies that what is meant by 'art' is in fact 'the artwork'. This artwork may be an object (a painting, photograph or sculpture); or it may be a performance, where the artist's body has replaced the artist's object; or it may be a narrative – for example, a video essay; or it may be the very production of emotion through a participatory re-enactment (such as Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001); or a decades-long community project (such as Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses*, 1993 to date); or a discussion with the 'audience': this is a practice so popularised after Joseph Beuys's *Bureau for Direct Democracy* (1972) that it feels superfluous to mention more recent examples. In any event, our point is that all the above are *artworks*. And as long as we keep identifying 'art' as a terrain of production with 'artwork' as the output manufactured in this terrain, certain questions will be impossible to answer, or even pose with a concreteness that might correspond to the historical conditions that call for them.

That said, a long string of political-theoretical endeavours, including, for example, the feminist art history that emerged out of second-wave feminism, have demanded programmes of research where attention shifts from the artwork to what used to be called 'art's context'. Very often this turn to context ultimately facilitated an understanding of

how an artwork ended up being what it is. Yet sometimes the turn to context permitted an understanding of *why* certain subjects were excluded from making artworks or were denied the possibility of making what mattered most: avant-garde artworks – the many feminist analyses of Impressionism, Expressionism and Surrealism are cases in point. In short, what feminism and postcolonial critique explained in the 1970s and 1980s was that, first, art is a competitive and yet not level field; second, that in this field, hierarchies tend to be specific and repeated rather than random and occasional; third, that these hierarchies serve a purpose, which must be sought *beyond* the making of artworks or the domain of art, in the wider realm of social relations. One of this volume's aims is then to encourage research that takes all these questions, now conveniently placed in the deep-freeze compartment of art theory in a package labelled 'identity politics', and re-animate them within an urgent enquiry on artistic labour and its contribution to shaping the field of production.

This is why we propose to differentiate between 'the artwork', as the *output* of artistic production, and the *outcome* of 'art' as a way of production. The outcome of art can be more elusive, or concrete, than an artistic output but it is certainly more significant – as it can be either a lot more conservative or a lot more radical than a mere artwork/output, to which a date and place are normatively attached (even in the case of durational artworks). The outcome of art emanates from a very complex terrain which, *today* (after the mid-1990s), tends to subsume what Marx called *forces of production* into *relations of production*. Indeed, a problem the repercussions of which contemporary art history needs to unfathom is that in art in the twenty-first century everything threatens to dissolve into relations of production. The forces of production, by which we mean principally a combination of the means/tools/basics of labour alongside the ability of humans/artists to labour (labour power), refer us to rather specific things. Against this specificity, 'relations of production' refers to the infinitely expandable yet historically prescribed aggregate of social relations into which the worker/artist needs to enter in order to produce. When 'immaterial' labour becomes hegemonic, the relations of production multiply to the extent that all social relations can potentially count as relations of production. 'Immaterial labour' is indeed a misnomer, for what this term tends to refer to are the *results or products* of labour: communication, care, affect, service, experience and so on. How then is capital going to control these results-products, indeed, be in the position to apprehend them as such? In this regime, capital's need to

impose ‘measure’ exerts an ideological domination that pulls constantly towards outputs. This is, for example, evident in the literal measurement of academic research in the UK known as the Research Excellence Framework (where a specific number of outputs is requested of each academic producer, a number which decreases according to a hierarchy of acceptable research impediments). The numerous artists employed at UK art schools are also subjected to the same measurement of their ‘research’ – research crystallised into, and demonstrated as, outputs/exhibited artworks. We see no good reason why this institutionally ‘measured’ artistic labour should not be taken into account when we seek to understand art’s contribution to the field of production today. Moving therefore from a critique focused on outputs to one focused on outcomes is neither simple nor desirable under the aegis of capitalist reason at present. But it is surely ideologically charged: outcomes cannot always be mapped with precision. It is outcomes, rather than outputs, which often exceed measure.

To give one example beyond the terrain of art, anthropologist David Graeber (2013) has argued that the established view that the social movements of the 1960s failed needs reviewing. For Graeber, the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism, which is what followed the late 1960s confrontations, has relied on its ferocious and often pre-emptive attack on social movements ever since. What neoliberalism thus implies is that the broader outcome of these 1960s uprisings was far from a failure, since they introduced into the remit of the real the possibility of a world revolution. So, even if the immediate and concrete ‘output’ of that moment was a failure, the broader and more complex *outcome* of the same process can hardly be characterised as such. Such an outcome defined, Graeber insists, the content of neoliberalism as a form of retaliation against the perceived power of the people. The ferocious policing and suppression of public protest after 2008 would indeed be inexplicable if this potential (this perceived power of the people) were not taken seriously, despite the relatively small numbers of those that take to the streets.

We will now use an abstracted example concerning the distinction between output and outcome from the art world. Let us say that in 2014 an artist makes sculpture. He uses his tools (possibly including technology), his materials and his labour power to produce an object identified as ‘sculpture’. Does the artist’s production end there, with this realisation of the artwork in terms of an output? Absolutely not. The making of an object (or a video or anything else) is only a *first stage*

in the production process. The second stage of production requires the artist to enter social and economic relations that will permit the output to be seen and experienced. If the artist is already 'successful', through an accumulation of wealth through sales (of artworks or their documentation), he will have a small team of people working for him. This small team he calls 'studio'. It is indeed an expanded studio where all the needs for the production of art by this artist are addressed: an architect may input his knowledge and skills, an ethnographer or social historian will perhaps bring new readings on the subject most inspiring to the artist, the marketing employee might approach important people about coming to see the work, the administrator will book tickets and hotel rooms and so on. To keep this studio facility, so essential to his production, the artist must sell work, *constantly*, and so must keep re-entering specific economic relations with private and public art institutions. Let us say that this artist is far from conservative, at least in terms of his output. He might well be an artist-writer whose writings may include references to the avant-garde, socialism, the revolution, and which theoretically frame his sculpture. (This is not in fact a new attribute of the identity 'artist' but today it is put, perhaps despite the genuine intentions of the artist, to explicit market use.) Also, the artist refuses to let his sculpture rot in museum corners, even if these corners are in the Tate. We can imagine that the artist takes his sculpture (or his performance, or 'event') to the streets, to activist meetings, to universities and inner city schools, to train stations and factory gates, wherever 'real life' exists. His sculpture is irreverent, disruptive and politically charged in those contexts. If you happen to encounter it there, you may well be tempted to find the output of this artist (no longer just sculpture but a lot more) 'avant-garde'. Sacralised in the holy water of actually existing social relations, some of these sculptures must indeed return to the institution to be sold – *sold*, so that the 'expanded studio' which permits the generation of such progressive artworks can continue to run and so that the artist can make a living. But, in the course of doing this, art as a terrain of production (rather than the artist) brings forth all sorts of other effects, including the continuation of the artwork as luxury commodity, the demand for gallery representation, the requirement for an always inferior and invisible 'dark matter' (Sholette 2010) of art workers who will accept to work for the expanded studio of the 'proper' artist, the affirmation of skill, craftsmanship, perhaps object-centricity but also autonomy in the eyes of the institution – and so on. This is part of the broader *outcome* of art as practised in the case just described. The outcome is not thus

purely ideological. Rather, it entails and affirms key *material* dimensions of art, today, as a field of production. Certainly, the generation of an ideologically challenging artwork is also part of this broader outcome – but, again, it is only *a* part in a larger jigsaw puzzle of the relations of production that the terrain of art constitutes.

What we wish to suggest here is that this ‘successful’ artist has a different degree of ‘access’ to autonomy than an artist who would like to but is unable to hire human labour power, along with his ‘material tools’, to produce work. Indeed, if we shift attention from output to outcome we realise that *not* all artists have the same kind of relation to autonomy. We cannot therefore arrive at a general conclusion that describes art’s relation to autonomy at present. Access to an infrastructure of production (funding to buy materials and labour power, time to access knowledge, new trends in theory and so on) is not equally distributed to all labouring subjects that self-identify as artists. In fact, in global capitalism we find an international, extremely competitive ‘cloud’ of access opportunities (residencies, collections, exhibitions etc.), often requiring a great deal of paperwork or social networking or both, as a *prerequisite* for realising the production of the artwork/output with its claim to autonomy and possibly avant-garde status. That is, there is a prerequisite for achieving access to the *promise* of autonomy that the ‘true’ artwork symbolises. The less an artist has access to this infrastructure, the less she has access to autonomy. She can still produce *outputs*, yes. But these outputs will not be discussed in contexts that permit at least the accruing of symbolic capital (for example, in art historical essays). She can obtain her materials and make her sculpture but what she cannot do is fully exploit the current relations of production to her advantage. For example, she cannot afford to pay for international critics to visit her studio and participate in a workshop set up to discuss her work. She cannot enter social and economic relations that are in fact required (in that they are *not optional*) for contemporary artistic production in the full sense.

It is hard to not see that this system creates a *classed* artistic subject – that when combined with Terry Smith’s emphasis on a classed viewer in post-Cold War art, as previously discussed, it reveals art’s structural role in the reproduction of class divisions. Indeed, the ‘artist’ as understood at the top of the chain can be a completely different entity from the ‘artist’ as understood at the bottom of the chain. Access to resources at the top is so much easier than at the bottom that we must not be surprised to see the same ‘successful’ artists being invited time and again to all yesterday’s and tomorrow’s parties, aka biennials and, ultimately, the exhibitions

that matter. The recycling of the same artists' names is not a conspiracy on the part of the art institution: rather it affirms that a 'successful' artist is in a much better position to make better work. A successful artist, or collective (the distinction makes little difference in this context), will attract more funding and invitations, or can even contribute more of his/their own money to the production of the artwork. Someone from Sholette's 'dark matter' cannot. Reviewing the thesis on dark matter and successful and unsuccessful artists, we instead argue that *art as a terrain of production today partakes in the naturalising of society as a system of class relations*. For if class relations are affirmed in a domain of production (art) dedicated to critique, exposure and negation – precisely a domain of production that begs to differ, that still tries to pass as non-productive labour – class relations come to appear as a necessary evil encountered in productive and non-productive labour alike. This is the ideological paradox, if you will, of art understood as relations of production today. And it is at that point where the accuracy of the term 'avant-garde', when used to refer to the general, yet divided and stratified, field of production that we recognise as art, needs to be tested.

In trying to elucidate art's role in class struggle today, a special place must be reserved for the role of art institution as the site of the 'showable' in the broader sense. A collaborative artwork by Tino Sehgal or Chto Delat? has become as showable as a painting by Kazimir Malevich – who, Boris Groys reminds us, wrote his anti-nostalgia-for-past-and-present short essay 'On the Museum' as early as 1919 (Groys 2013, unpaginated). By 'showable' we mean equally work accepted as 'good enough to include in an expanded museum space', a space where the idea of 'the public' or 'visitors' or 'customers' or 'users' is tied to an *activity of leisure*. In addition to the separation between art and life (necessarily pushed by the museum which must extricate the new from real life (Groys 2008)), we have, in the museum or art exhibition, a sharp divide between 'work' and 'leisure'. It is therefore extremely difficult to convince a visitor in his or her leisure time of the 'truth' behind the output/artwork they have come to enjoy or at least experience: that for this output to exist, certain relations of production, in which the visitors' own life–work continuum is grounded – and which may also make this same visitor a component in an income-generating (for the artist, dealer etc.) 'relational' artwork – also have to be affirmed and reproduced. This is one way in which the museum, and the exhibition form more generally, mediate and pervert the real conditions of artistic and art-world labour and that labour's contribution to reproducing capitalism.

But, of course, as Groys asserted in 2002, radical art in the age of biopolitics (our age, one of total administration) is consciously 'absent and hidden', at the moment of its production, from the museum, to which it can return as documentation or even rumour. Again, in such cases, what a 'successful' artist can do, and how far she can go, is what is important. In a world where media narratives count as reality, rumours of transgression and outrageousness can contribute significantly to maintaining the artist's halo of experimentation and boosting careers. Typically, a successful artist's CV nowadays includes nominations for major prizes; major museum collections; several biennials; and participation in Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in 2011 or similar 'street credit' events. Indeed, an artist's navigation across all the above structures and processes is a requirement in the production of art today, which we can only grasp if we shift attention from artists' outputs to the broader outcome of art as relations of production. An emergent research programme able to accommodate this shift would need therefore to take the biopolitical reality of contemporary art at face value. This would be a rather unsettling operation: it would require, for example, both a re-investment in discredited methodologies such as biography, which will now have to be re-connected to how art production participates in class composition, and also an acknowledgement of how capital as social relation creates, *so far*, all available positions despite art's critical potential.

As social theorist Šefik Tatlić has commented in his engagement of Giorgio Agamben's famous formulation of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), 'after the era of colonization, the purpose of bare life (as a result of the imposition of the truth of capital) shifted from 'being a slave' to 'wanting to be a slave' (Tatlić 2009, 237). The aspiration to join the ranks of immaterial labourers, which requires education, social capital and post-Fordist skills, is tied to the ideological hegemony and reproduction of this desire. This means that 'the excluded' tend to strive for inclusion, 'success' and for becoming what Tatlić calls 'a lifestyle'.

In short, in shifting attention from output to outcome we encounter a certain ideology at work – an ideology that used to be known as that motivating the petty bourgeoisie but that is now extended to the terrain of radical art as well. To say therefore, as the Dutch collective BAVO did in 2006, and Léger reiterated, that the avant-garde artist in the early twenty-first century is the 'masochist in the system' (Léger 2012, 111) is the beginning rather than the conclusion of a research programme concerning *how* art is positioned within relations of production. Wanting

to be a slave? Yes, if there is no other option. But let us at least try to understand the role of art, rather than that of artworks, in serving masochism as a privilege; and let us consider whether such a culture of submission threatens to make our times less revolutionary and present the harnessing of our productivity into class relations as unavoidable. We hope that the research gathered in this volume makes apparent the fault lines of this logic, which belongs to capital rather than labour, including the complex labour that defines art.

We close therefore with a question: when the economy is no longer just the economy, what is art?



Figure 1: Mitra Tabrizian, *City, London* (2008). Exhibited at Stills.

Figure 2: Andreas Gursky, *Chicago, Board of Trade II* (1999). Exhibited at Stills.





Figure 3: Tracey Emin, *I've got it all* (2000). Exhibited at Stills.

Figure 4: Kai Kaljo, *Loser* (1997). Detail. Exhibited at Stills.





Figure 5: Marge Monko, *Shaken Not Stirred* (2012). Detail. Exhibited at CCA.

Figure 6: Raqs Media Collective, *Reverse Engineering the Euphoria Machine* (2010). Detail. Exhibited at CCA.





Figure 7: Hito Steyerl, *Lovely Andrea* (2007) DVD, 30'. Detail. Exhibited at CCA.

Figure 8: David Aronowitsch & Hanna Heilborn, *Slaves* (2008). Detail. Exhibited at CCA.





Figure 9: Ursula Biemann, *Deep Weather* (2012). Detail. Exhibited at CCA.

Figure 10: Jenny Marketou, *We Love Candy but Our Passion Is Collecting Art* (2008–09). Detail. Exhibited at CCA.





Figure 11: Claire Fontaine, *Capitalism Kills (Love)* (2012). Distributed at CCA and Stills.

Figure 12: Rick Lowe, *Project Row Houses* (1993 to date). Exhibited at CCA.





Figure 13: Francesco Jodice, *Dubai_Citytellers* (2010). Detail. Exhibited in the ECONOMY Film Lounge.

Figure 14: Michael Glawogger, *Workingman's Death* (2005). Detail. Exhibited in the ECONOMY Film Lounge.





Figure 15: Yorgos Zois, *Casus Belli* (2010). Detail. Exhibited in the ECONOMY Film Lounge.

Figure 16: Oliver Ressler & Dario Azzellini, *Comuna under Construction* (2010). Detail. Exhibited in the ECONOMY Film Lounge.



I

Production

Art as Property

Andrea Phillips

Introduction: auratic being / property being

What type of property is a contemporary art object? Clearly it is an object that may be bartered, and in one sense this is how we understand both its status as property and its value. But it is also clear that an art object is usually understood to have value in different ways, ways that differ or displace their value in terms of simple barter. Here I will argue that the ways in which art's transaction value shifts from one form of contemporary barter (call it exchange value) to another (call it auratic or mystic value) makes it a special kind of property. This is not to mistake the fact that all commodity-form barter works within a framework of mysticism and displacement, nor to suggest that the pricelessness of art is totally distinct from other luxury goods that are regularly exchanged for undisclosed (or proxied) sums. But I will argue that art both condenses and mystifies its transaction as property, and as such is inventive of further forms of capital development.

The mystery of value is a common attribute of all property when it comes to the moment of exchange (the moment at which a thing's property status becomes available to speculation) in the sense that the cloaking of value – its fictionalisation – is always a mechanism of barter. But art's mysterious value – its pricelessness – is significant due to the fact that it serves to remove the image or object from any comparison with other types of property, other types of trade. Such distancing from the commonality of pricing is deeply embedded in the culture of

artistic production, the ways in which artists are educated, made and perceived, and in the commercial and nominally public institutions that have developed to support it. So deep is this embedding that it is almost impossible to imagine an artistic social and institutional structure in which the image or object produced is understood as generative of other forms of property, other forms of trade and exchange (many artists have attempted this but rarely survived in the artistic economy without the production of some form of auratic and exclusive by-product). In a bid to begin to unpick the financial relations of art objects to this embedded history of mystic valuation, here I would like to draw attention to three things. First, the fact that art is in fact property, though naming it as such contravenes a set of ethical and aesthetic barriers to the understanding of it as such. Secondly, that if art is property, it must fall prey to the same political and financial contradictions of property that other property forms fall prey to – fluctuations in value, barter, speculation – all of which undermine the idea of priceless auratic value. Thirdly, that the structure of the art market is specifically designed to put space between these two concepts (art as property and art as priceless). Whilst it is true that there is an increasing amount of speculative art devices available for those that seek to profit by art as an investment class, the vast majority of the art world, its exhibition circuits, events and even fairs, is designed to protect the artwork from indiscrete speculation. All of which seems to suggest that the whole schema of art trade – its population of gallerists, collectors, sponsors, conservators and makers – is structured so as to propose one ontological form over another; *auratic* (priceless, profound, transcendental) being over *property* (priced, manufactured, limited) being.

Property here will be understood primarily in terms of the status implied by an economic transaction (whether that be direct – through the artist – more commonly, indirect – through a dealer or the auction room – or deferred financially and semantically through inheritance, patronage or other forms of gifting). Property is the object owned through such economic transaction. Whilst we rarely approach contemporary art as property – indeed we are conditioned to understand art as something very much other than property – it is structured as property at its dogmatic and often withdrawn core. The withdrawing of art as economic property is one of its central attributes. This veiling is a major success story of contemporary art's distributive franchising mechanism and has successfully installed itself as a global support structure employing many people and contributing significantly to local,

national and transnational cultural industries, all of which are reliant on attributing non-property-based values to contemporary art (creativity, significance, vitality, impulse, subjective expression etc.). As artists – as all of us involved in the various levels of artistic production, from curators to gallery owners and academics – produce forms of work that are critical of the system in which we find ourselves, we need to work out how exactly we can carry on ‘biting the hand that feeds us’ and how much we need to deal with the far more troubling relation between the veiling of art as property under the mystique of creative pricelessness and the social world that often provides art’s content. If art is property, how does it contribute to a broader set of cultural and economic concerns regarding assets as a key element of financial capitalism? If contemporary art succeeds in disguising its property-ontology, how does its economic system mimic the larger one in which it is contained, and how can we contemplate the relationship between the art market and that broader site of mystic profit-making: financialisation?

But, first, a clarificatory note on the contemporary art image or object: here I am claiming all forms of recent and contemporary art are property, and that this covers all forms of artistic production, however distributed and/or ephemeral. All forms of contemporary art – paintings, sculptures, installations, performances, eroding objects, caucuses devised as art, lecture-demonstrations by artists etc. – need to be understood as property. This is not withstanding the many artistic and academic arguments that have been produced to differentiate between these different forms of artistic production, in which a performance or installation is said to be un-commodifiable and non-reproduceable due to its presentness, ephemerality or site-specificity, or in which an alternative or oppositional form of value is asserted. It seems to me that such attempts to protect forms against their commodity status, rather than slipping the noose of property ontology, simply add value. This can be seen, on one level, in the institutional scramble to reconstitute performance works from the 1950s and 1960s, to resuscitate, for example, early under-known actions by women artists within a feminist canon. Such gestures, whilst of great public and academic interest, create property, the exemplification of which can be seen as the residuals of how such actions make their way into commercial gallery representation or auction house, often despite the artist’s original intentions.

How might art be property?

(a) First, as a tool of transaction which involves the exchange of objects for money. Artists need to earn a living through some kind of financial transaction of their work (direct or indirect), and for many negotiating the ways this is done is a complex problem. A few contemporary artists sell their work directly to people but most attempt to get representation from a commercial gallery (see Sholette 2010). Artists, therefore, in making goods, however dispersed, make objects-to-be-owned; make property. A normal understanding of property would assume that in passing from the artist to the buyer (via the dealer) the property ownership is swapped in the exchange.

(b) But, secondly, art is understood to be owned by its author (the artist) in some form of perpetuity. This type of ownership is complex, and might be understood through psychoanalysis as well as through certain legal infrastructures (artists resale rights are, for example, based on this premise).¹ Here, some form of ownership always stays with the artist, however many markets or trades the object passes through. The first and the second aspects of art property seem contradictory (how can an art object be owned by its author and sold on the market at the same time?) but in fact are useful aspects of the attribution of value – the artwork in question, in retaining an aura of ownership on the part of its author, even after an economic transaction of transfer of ownership has taken place, adds value. In some circumstances this aura of ownership is literalised in the form of instructions from the artist, passed on via the dealer or the auction house, as to the conditions of any sale (many artists and dealers have ‘blacklists’ of collectors who are not traded with on the basis of the liability that these people are likely to try and trade a work from the primary to the secondary market, a fact generally assumed to effect an auratic if not actual decrease in financial and reputational value).

(c) Thirdly, art is often thought to be the property of a museum or gallery where it is part of a permanent collection. When this museum or gallery is funded by the state it could be asserted that such a work is owned by

1 Introduced in 2006 in the European Union, Artists Resale Rights allow authors recuperation, under certain conditions and contexts, of a certain percentage of profit when their artworks are sold on after the first transaction via the dealer or auction house. See DACS website: www.dacs.org.uk/for-artists/artists-resale-right/in-detail (accessed 9 June 2013).

the state, or, as is often suggested, held by the state in trust for the people. This third type of art property is a decreasing typology, and non-existent in many parts of the world. The fact that many such works are actually on 'permanent loan' (an obvious oxymoron) from collectors to galleries makes such an assertion of state beneficence complex. It is certainly the case that an increasing amount of staff time in major museums and galleries around the world is spent convincing collectors' and patrons' circles to donate, loan or fund the purchase of works to be displayed, often in return for the naming of a gallery or new museum wing. Here the terms of ownership are most confusing: what are the proprietary economics of ownership in a national gallery which is partially funded by the public purse, houses works donated by collectors (and increasingly frequently artists), for reasons of complex patronage (in which the donation may well be given in faith and commitment to, say, public education, but is also likely to increase the value of the artwork and thus the artist's oeuvre exponentially)?

Interestingly, the very contradictions exposed by my rough description of art's ambiguous but non-contractual senses of ownership, which in other markets might decrease value, actually *increases* the value of art objects. In fact, so important is the link between what we might call author-ownership, buyer-ownership and display-value in art that they are not to be parted without financial harm being done to the parties. The collector needs the artist to still 'own' the work in some way to retain its value-creating aura of authenticity and autonomy (both key terms in any property market). The artist needs to hold on to his or her ownership in order to secure his or her reputational and progressive valuation, a valuation that is increased by the collector's ownership of the object-image in question, but also needs to be paid for the work and to thus enact a property exchange. The gallery or museum director needs the value of the work to be retained in order to balance the financial ecosystem of public/private financing that is now the basis of the vast majority of contemporary display structures.

What is property?

It is important to acknowledge that there is a complex and long history of property law in Europe and North America that shapes the politics of ownership, suffrage and access to public space and expression and that this is both the economic and political context in which any discussion of art and property sits. This is really foundational: that property ownership, in Europe and North America at the very least, is the legal

basis for rights to vote and freedom of speech. This tradition defines how we think the relation between public and private, and how, especially, the concepts are linked to class, land and house-ownership. In this tradition, the right to property becomes naturalised, a fact that becomes apparent in the UK's political and social habitus in various forms at the time of writing, in 2013, in arguments about subjects as superficially diverse as: tax reform (wherein the UK's tradition of assuming those with most land and goods should naturally be protected from overt calls for taxation based on equality); social benefit payments (wherein the systematic withdrawal of payments retains the 'undeserving' poor as a non-property-owning class in the widespread and politically divisive belief that if people on social security payments owned a house they would not appreciate its value – and its value might not appreciate); and the approval of plans to develop a high-speed rail link between London and the North (the major block to which has not in fact been the very viable questions of ecological destruction caused by such an enterprise but the fact that the route will pass through a swathe of land owned by extremely wealthy land owners who have raised high-profile objections to plans for its route). Property ownership is also naturalised in more complex ways through private donation to 'public' cultural institutions, wherein the role of the patron as an essential social contributor masks the fact of decreasing public funding and lessens the impact of any solidarity among art institutions to lobby for public support as they compete with each other for private sponsorship. What we might understand as the *naturalisation* of public-private financing in European culture's post-welfare state neoliberal culture has been rehearsed fully in the arts sector; contemporary art has, over many decades and throughout periods of widespread support for large-scale state sponsorship of the arts, formed the vanguard of public-private partnership, leading the way in the *fictionalisation of concepts of publicness*.

Property ownership is historically embedded politically and psychically in occidental culture. Marx's analysis of property ownership (land, housing) was written at a point during the development of the industrial revolution in which ownership of land and the means of production were transformed by new mechanisms of capital speculation. Broadly, new forms of enclosure were produced technically and somatically through industrial ownership; the expansion of house ownership among the rapidly self-enfranchising bourgeoisie was accompanied by the rise of rentier culture but also the development of organised unionism. This complexity of property – as both an enfranchisement and a

disenfranchisement – has roots in classical Athenian legislature over the right to public speech being governed by property ownership (dividing the *polis* from the *oikos*). Centuries of political and cultural infrastructure based socially and psychically on aristocratic land rights, left undiminished by the occasional revolution, had left intact both the property form that Marx analysed and the privatised culture that we, in turn, inherit.

Marx's critique of political economy is, in fact, an exposure of the technicity of the economy in relation to all its actors – workers, factory owners, rentiers, the aristocracy etc. In this sense its logic is simple: in order to produce change, it is important to expose the social conditions of the economy and its relation to everyday life (again, reminding us that the site of economic thinking is the household – *oikos*/economy). To put it simply, Marx wanted us to understand the economy as social rather than naturalised through technocratic regulation (a fact that many are still trying to communicate today). Famously, Marx thought that the struggle between the propertied and the property-less, so clearly unequal, would push working people into revolutionary action and the creation of a communist structure to replace the capitalist one that they had experienced only through oppression. From the 1844 manuscripts onwards Marx articulated this as a historically embedded, philosophical and, above all, social concern:

The domination of the land as an alien power over men is already inherent in feudal landed property. The serf is the adjunct of the land. Likewise, the lord of an entailed estate, the first-born son, belongs to the land. It inherits him. Indeed, the dominion of private property begins with property in land – that is its basis. [...] Similarly, the rule of landed property does not appear directly as the rule of mere capital. For those belonging to it, the estate is more like their fatherland. It is a constricted sort of nationality.

It is easy to see that the entire revolutionary movement necessarily finds both its empirical and its theoretical basis in the movement of *private property* – more precisely, in that of the economy. (Marx 2000 [1932], 44, emphasis in the text)

Far from predicting universal suffrage from the chain of property ownership, Marx in fact described accurately the system that would develop into the abstract financialisation that is now the dominant mechanism of a biopoliticised global economics. Not only did his analysis of the total capture of human life by capital predict analyses well into the

twenty-first century by political and philosophical commentators such as Paolo Virno (2003), Antonio Negri (2011) and Franco Berardi (2009), but his understanding of abstraction and alienation proved complete in the banking collapse of 2008, precipitated by an extended and commercially enfranchised fetishisation of private property among those that could least afford it. Furthermore, Marx's definition of the social basis of economic structures is key to understanding the subjective and affective relation we have to the idea of property ownership – what in 1844 he called 'the positive transcendence of *private property* as the appropriation of *human life*' (Marx 2000 [1932], 44, emphasis in the text) and thus the alienation of people from their modes of production.

In between these two historical scenarios – the first, the expectation of a revolution caused by the recognition and rejection of inequality; the second, the protection of capital before people in the cause of global financial securitisation – a point can be observed that is important, in its affective and economic significance, in the structuring of the way in which we consider art's ontology separate from its essential basis as property. This short-lived scenario is the innovation, and subsequently destruction, of the idea in the West of the welfare state, and with it the formal (albeit cursory in many respects) commitment to the concept of social equality. The provision of subsidised housing, free healthcare, transport, broadcast and other social infrastructure, occurred roughly at the same time in northern Europe as the expansion or formalisation of subsidised arts policy (taking its long-established cue from the widely accepted benefit of patronage of arts institutions in poor areas before the two world wars), born out of post-war Keynesian 'leashed' social capitalism, promoting an albeit hierarchised concept of parity and access, widening social investment and participation. Whilst this scene of cultural entitlement – access to the best of the arts for the many, with free entry to museums and galleries, local arts centres providing arts workshops and subsidised tickets to theatres and music venues – is now widely recognised as condescending and supportive of highly standardised and often elitist cultural values, it embedded across almost a century a state-sanctioned concept of the arts being beneficial – being 'good for you' – on a broader basis than any supposed by Enlightenment philosophy (within which, of course, such ideas had their root). Whilst none of this changed concepts of property *per se*, art's ethos as public, as not-property but instead public good, took seed. As Western governments towards the end of the twentieth century turned back to, and enhanced substantially, private and neoliberal economic

mechanisms, the field of contemporary art maintained an aura of healthy distance from property development whilst contributing significantly to its implementation both at local level (through gentrification) and at the level of the market (through a substantial increase in new derivatives and art investment schemes, alongside a substantial blossoming of new art investors) (see Malik and Phillips 2012). Here the registers of social care and privatised culture become supremely entangled.

Contemporary art has embedded within it two contradictory meanings: that of social necessity and that of valuable asset. This is a historic phenomenon and, as I have suggested, we are currently living and working at the end of perhaps its most bureaucratically organised period (as the welfare state wanes, so does the Keynesian idea of embedding the value of the arts into social life on a national scale in the UK and many other parts of Europe). If now, rather than a social necessity, art is considered as a space of unregulated freedom within a society that is unequally regulated, the financial structures that support art's production as well as the subjective forms of autonomy and authorship upon which art is based need to be examined closely. Currently, art is financed (in Europe to varying degrees) by an ambiguous mixture of public and private means, producing a veritable confusion of messages between the social and the autonomous (perhaps most evident in ongoing debates about participatory and educational arts practice). Freedom of expression is at once only permitted to those who have an unusual autonomy within the system (artists and occasionally curators) and held up as a prospective socially ameliorative tool in which *the private artwork imparts the value of freedom to its un-free spectators*. What Grant Kester calls the 'ontic spaciousness of the bourgeois subject' embedded in the history of property is passed on via the artwork as a primary and naturalised ontological privacy that, as I am now going to explore, we may need to give up in order to move on (Kester 2011, 108).

Why does property ownership matter?

Contemporary capitalist ideology is based on the construction of surplus value through the cheap labour of many returned as profit for a few through property ownership. That property may be a house, a patent, a company listed on the stock market, a copyright or an art object. All of these things should be considered objects, however speculative or illusory they might initially seem on the basis that they each have an ontological foundation in the making and transaction of things, things

whose materiality is variously dispersed or strategically ignored. At base is an ontology of objects that are marked through their being possessed, through their destination as owned ('commodities') and through their value transformation through ownership ('commodification'). Property ownership matters because it is the mechanism through which financial transactions are made both in general and on the art market.

What Andrew Glyn has called 'unleashed' capitalism in differentiation to the Keynesian system of social or 'leashed' capital is the mechanism that makes the art market thrive: speculation, risk and the build-up of increasingly precipitous financial devices structured into daily life, globalisation of trade and labour, lack of security, opportunism, non-fixed, deterritorialised activity, cognitive capital, precarity, fragmentation etc. (see Glyn 2006). These mechanisms are not simply used to make the art market function, thereby using objects made by artists to increase profit through a baroque and often confusing trading system; they also become embedded in artworks as ontological and aesthetic frameworks. The attributes we value *most* in artworks are precarity, deterritorialisation, transitivity, dispersion: the very principles that are valued by the art market. These tropes become definitional, reputational, value-adding. The market converts this value into price. But why pick out art property for particular critique? Because contemporary art objects not only mask their ontic privatisation generally through the art market's unregulated and precarious, unpegged 'priving' mechanism, but also through the very critique of this same system (Hyde 2010, 184). To illustrate this I want to contrast two objects, or rather one type of object used in two different ways. The object is a high-definition television screen, and the use is first as the central element of a work by the artist Hito Steyerl and secondly as a looted object. The theft of the latter was caught on CCTV during riots in the UK in the summer of 2011 and screened repeatedly in the media coverage that followed. The two contexts are interesting not simply owing to the fact that the high-definition television has different functions within each, but because the contexts of these uses – an art gallery and a UK high street in the midst of recession – serve to highlight two connected concepts of property.

To start with the context of the UK riots: the riots in London, Manchester, Birmingham and elsewhere in the UK in the summer of 2011 were not organised by articulate and collectivised activists and protesters, yet they were equal in political importance to those occupations of Wall Street, the London Stock Exchange and the Amsterdam Beurs, as well as many other places, that began in the autumn of the same year. What

struck many commentators was the fact that, when asked why they were looting and burning their own neighbourhoods, the rioters did not respond with clear anti-government or anti-consumerist statements. They did not express themselves verbally but did so through the actions of destruction aimed at raiding local shops and through the goods that they were taking: television screens and music systems, branded trainers, cigarettes, alcohol and soft drinks etc. (i.e. luxury goods and goods of immediate gratification). Mirroring a poverty-stricken version of the antagonistic and public display of excessive wealth accumulation by bankers left uncorrected in the wake of the credit crisis, this riot was recognised by such commentators as Zygmunt Bauman as 'a revolt of frustrated consumers' and 'the mutiny of the humiliated' (Bauman 2011, unpaginated).

If the riots were not marked by a radical, transformative or revolutionary potential, as many have pointed out, then what were they expressing? For Bauman, the link between the riots and the increased residualisation of social property in inner cities was clear:

Segregation and polarization in the cities is today the result of a free and politically uncontrolled play of market forces; if the state policy makes its contribution, then [it does so] only in the form of the governmental refusal to be bothered with the responsibility for human welfare and its decision to 'contract it out' to private capital. (Bauman 2011, unpaginated)

Slavoj Žižek also diagnosed the riots as a symptom of capitalist ideology:

As with the car burnings in the Paris banlieues in 2005, the UK rioters had no message to deliver. [...] This is why it is difficult to conceive of the UK rioters in Marxist terms, as an instance of the emergence of the revolutionary subject; they fit much better the Hegelian notion of the 'rabble,' those outside organized social space, who can express their discontent only through 'irrational' outbursts of destructive violence – what Hegel called 'abstract negativity'. [...] On British streets during the unrest, what we saw was not men reduced to 'beasts,' but the stripped-down form of the 'beast' produced by capitalist ideology. (Žižek 2011, unpaginated)

Here we might understand that what both confused and titillated most Marxist sociologies and philosophies of the riots was the fact of *incorporation* demonstrated by the rioters. Rather than reject capital and its objects, here were people identifying with capital and its outward

signatures. Instead of rejecting or recognising the relation between local and global infrastructures of capital production, rioters gorged upon them.

Two screens

The damage wrought by such capitalism in inner cities, as elsewhere, does not simply affect the quantity and quality of cheap housing provision for those unable to pay, but assaults the very core of the idea of property provision. People in the UK in the summer of 2011 not only demonstrated physically that we live in a world of private privilege in which their rights to civic space are increasingly eroded, and any commitment they might feel towards their community is undermined, but, in the form of their riots, acted out that privatisation with the destructive energy produced by its psychic affects. There are many things to say about these events, more than there is room for here, including their supposed depoliticised organisation via BBM, their relation to the increasing destabilisation of connected welfare state systems of support in poor and fragile neighbourhoods, and their chaotic and negated vitalism. But here I want to stress one important factor: these were riots about property, and also about property objects, from houses to Nike trainers. Without going to art school or doing a philosophy degree, these (mainly but not only) young people produced an aesthetic of property desire that exactly symptomatised what I want to describe of the art object – an aesthetic in which the primacy of the object's ontological status is marked through property, at once desirous and never entirely accessible, and, crucially, with no seeming alternative.

The wide-screen television looting, caught on camera and rapidly circulated, became emblematic of what many commentators deemed the looters' selfish sense of immediate gratification. Beneath even the most balanced reportage lurked an ethical assumption about what motivated the looting; if you are hungry you steal food, if you are bored and already over-endowed with welfare state benefits you steal television screens. Yet the object of the screen bears some scrutiny as a thing in itself. Apart from the fact that branded screens are of high social value, size means a great deal within a social milieu that increasingly evolves around not simply watching television but communicating through the screen in the form of gaming and social networking. These screens – in particular with their advanced digital technology – allow the user to connect to an often anonymous group of other users as part of a dominant entertainment

form (in which people collaborate on various game frames and formats not as makers but as collective and yet isolated users). The wide screens of the televisions are sleek, black, usually thin and minimal in design. Their size is dominant within the social space of the home (the living room, the bedroom, the kitchen – sometimes all three). They represent a huge social calibre; they confer reputational value on the owner.

In *Strike*, a short (28-second) video made in 2010, Hito Steyerl approaches a wide LCD screen mounted on a casing and breaks its surface with a hammer and chisel. Upon contact with the chisel the black screen immediately opens up to a dazzling array of colour lines. The work, which can be accessed in a few different forms, all around 30 seconds in duration, on YouTube, has also been displayed as an object (the broken screen mounted on a plinth). Steyerl's work reminds us of the physicality of the pixel through which we are so often transported to fantasies of capital and commodification. The act with which the work is made – the smashing of glass, the excessive destruction, mirrors that of the looters, except for the fact that, instead of smashing glass windows and vitrines to access fetishised objects (the acts of the looters), the artist here smashes the object of fetishisation – the television screen. The work also seems designed to communicate to us the art object's commodity status, and in this its inefficiency in broader terms of commodity transformation or redistribution. Yet lodged within the work is another type of fantasy wherein the artist produces an object that transcends through demonstrative critique the bounds of its own limited status. Another version of the work, *Strike II* (2012), has the artist and her daughter approaching the screen to smash it, at which point we begin to view the scene from the 'inside', from the point of view of the wounded screen as it were (a view that only reveals some fleshy colours confusingly arbitrary and quick). Steyerl, an articulate and provocative member of an increasingly concerned community of artists who understand all too well their location within a system of commodification, has written often and intriguingly about the possibility of becoming a pixilated image, of inhabiting and embedding herself through, and in, the technology that otherwise consumes us. Participation in/as the thing itself (rather than as a subject outside of the object) for Steyerl, opens up new forms of power:

To participate in the image as thing means to participate in its potential agency—an agency that is not necessarily beneficial, as it can be used for every imaginable purpose. It is vigorous and sometimes even viral. And it will never be full and glorious, as images are bruised

and damaged, just as everything else within history. (Steyerl 2010, unpaginated)

On the one hand, Steyerl's description of this complete identification with the object – the television screen – and her attempts to describe or enact forms of inhabiting, becoming, the object, might be exactly what the 2010 rioters were doing when they were witnessed stealing televisions instead of promoting anti-capitalist slogans. This negative vitality is what Steyerl is identifying, though 'not necessary beneficial' in the sense of a politics of subjective identification. On the other, the contrast between the two screens caught on camera, one posted by an artist on YouTube, the other from the CCTV screens of the shops and warehouses being looted (and later used as evidence in courts to prosecute as many participants in the riots as police were able to identify), is striking. To put it bluntly, one is deliberative and exceptional within its milieu, the other is dumb in both senses of the word; its critique only retroactively fitted by philosophers and social critics, none of whom shares the lifestyle of those looters in whose actions they attempt to identify a new type of political action, a new and highly ambivalent political subject.

In a sense, both artist and looter are caught in a trap set by the object, a trap with no way out. Within Steyerl's attempt to reveal the 'thingness' of the object that produces images and at the same time speak from inside that site of pixilation itself there is a demonstration of the boundedness of art's relation to the object. In the rioters' looting there is an equal dependency, not simply on the flat screen television monitors and their promise of endless and fantastic seduction, but also on the necessity of possession and its interminable insatiability. Both are caught in the entrapment of property. Both are demonstrating its violence and its production of inequality.

Beyond the private object

If art produces property in its (tangible or intangible, individually or collectively authored) objects, however critical, then the simple thing to do is get rid of them, or to make them functional within a community of equals in which *authorship is not a key determinant of their function*. Grant Kester proposes that the answer (to the question of 'how?') lies in changing the relation between the object and its audience, and thus recalibrating what is supposed as artistic labour. Currently, he suggests, the artist's labour 'offers a model of authentic creativity defined in

implicit opposition to the alienated labour of the market system. The artist's labour, in the act of creation, marks an autonomous and free exercise of will, a beauty (or transgressive meaning) is extracted from the dross of quotidian reality' (Kester 2011, 100–01). For Kester, this is not simply related to art in which the act of participation is paramount (the work he is most associated with as a writer) but to its extension as an object to be viewed in the gallery. Not only does the relation between object and viewer in the gallery or museum maintain the property relation, but it also keeps intact the subject–object relation that supports private property acquisition:

Property and, most importantly, the act of possession, emerged in the philosophy of the Enlightenment as one of the chief markers of legitimate subject status – not merely the possession of property, but, more specifically, the faculty of possession, as it is exercised by the subject. [...] The essentially fluid, processual, status of bourgeois identity, and its dependence on a possessive relationship to the external world (and a competitive relationship to other subjects), introduces certain tensions around modes of collective or communal solidarity that might impinge on or restrict the expressive powers of the individual bourgeois subject. (Kester 2011, 107–09)

Kester's interest is in describing artistic projects that are more embedded socially and durationally in communities, wherein the artist loses some of this autonomy – or uses it contingently. This moves us partially towards a rejection of art property, but does not substantially constitute a complete rejection (Kester retains something of a special status for the skills of the artist). To give up the manufacture of the property–object means to redefine the role of the artist and his or her labour on structural terms. It also means a recalibration of what constitutes art's market; to question the ways in which the art market finds property value in the most dispersed and collaborative actions, and to then question the impetus for those actions and the need for them either to position themselves or be subsumed under the terminologies and typologies of contemporary art.

The de-ontologisation of privacy

A final point might be to think through the concepts of contingency that artistic labour and its making of property hangs on to, and the methods through which political philosophy has in recent years devised

mechanisms wherein art and its theorists have provided a critique internal to the object–subject property relations normalised by display habits, rather than external to this. In Chantal Mouffe’s repositioning of the Aristotelian concept of agonism in which artists play their full part, for example, or in Jacques Rancière’s concept of politics as an eventual and continuous disruption of policed order to which artworks contribute, we have systems that allow us to imagine art as a critical agent within society that either fails to grasp, or eschews, the need for an examination of the totality of art’s structural reliance on an essential ontological division: art/not art; property/its lack (see Rancière 2013; 2009; Mouffe 2009). Whilst both theorists argue clearly for these mechanisms within the cultivation of a certain kind of democracy (broadly, open, social democracy modelled on a Habermasian logic of the public sphere as a zone of gathering and debating however critically), when they apply their ideas to art (or when we apply their ideas to art), they serve to sustain the model of the artist as a unique, singularised subject who is able to embody and perform this contradiction haptically, without rocking the economic foundations of the art market or disturbing its privatising ontology. How can we begin to work at a different temporal, spatial and social scale, eschewing privatisation by resisting the formats through which privatisation occurs at the same time as using the collaborative and organisational skills so evident in the institutions of art that we establish and maintain? How can we work without ‘foreclos[ing] the possibility that creative insight might be generated through less proprietary forms of compositional agency’? (Kester 2011, 36) We might call this the *de-ontologisation of privacy* in the object through a shift in scale, temporality and function, and a letting go of the requirement to produce private objects on the part of artists. It is of course not very seductive, but then processes of political production rarely are.

Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour: Reflections on Its Recent History

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The debate on immaterial labour and art has garnered an enormous amount of attention recently, yet, curiously there has been little substantive discussion about its history and assumptions. Indeed, its terms are taken to be *de facto* self-evident, in a way very similar to the rapid acceptance of the notion of the ‘dematerialisation of art’ in the 1960s neo-avant-garde art world. Consequently, we need to be clear about what is being claimed in its name, particularly when Maurizio Lazzarato himself soon disowned the concept after having revalorised it as a category of political economy in the 1990s: ‘No sooner had we borrowed the concept than we were faced with ambiguities. People interpreted *material* and *immaterial* as opposites’; and: ‘Shortly after writing those articles I decided to abandon the idea and haven’t used it since’ (Lazzarato 2010, 12). So, far from immaterial labour being eminently legible as a concept, it needs to be reconstituted as the site of a problem (see Osborne 2008, 17). I want to analyse the concept therefore via two questions: is it coherent as a concept? And, if so, what is its status in relation to the production and reception of contemporary art?

But, first, we need to trace its history as a category of productive labour, for its recent origins in political economy have a significant part to play in its current cultural identity (and in the misunderstandings that have accompanied its cultural and artistic emergence). Immaterial labour is first coined as a discrete concept in Italian Marxist-feminism of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In fact, it is the initial work of Leopoldina Fortunati and Silvia Federeci on domestic labour and immaterial

labour – affect, care, psychological support and communication in the home – which had a huge impact on the development of the category in Antonio Negri, Lazzarato and post-Operaism more generally (indicatively, see Fortunati 1995 [1981] and Federici 2012b [1974; 1975]). This is not something one tends to pick up in Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* (2000) or even from Lazzarato's essay 'Immaterial Labour' (1996b). For Fortunati, in particular, the immaterial labour of the home, mostly conducted by women, is the primary labour that enables productive labour and the cycles of capitalist reproduction to take place. As such, in facilitating productive labour and the maintenance of labour power, domestic immaterial labour and productive (material) labour are shown to be coextensive. Indeed, it can be said that immaterial labour and productive labour are the different, but interrelated, parts of the same cycle of production/reproduction. Productive labour power emerges from and is sustained by immaterial labour. As Fortunati argues: 'Material production is usually set in motion not immediately, but after the first exchange of immaterial use-values (communication, affect, love) has taken place' (Fortunati 2007, 141).

But for Fortunati immaterial labour is *not* just the preparatory ground for material production – certainly in the wake of the new economy. Rather, as a set of processes locked into the cycle of reproduction/production–production/reproduction, immaterial labour in the home becomes a key site of the impact of immaterial labour in the production process – the labour involved in the production of the creative informational content of a commodity or involved in the routine processing of informational content in the service economy (Lazzarato 1996b). That is, one of the palpable changes that has taken place in the sphere of domestic labour under the new (post-Fordist) economy and the rise in women's waged labour, is the technological impact of immaterial labour in production on the content and quality of women's immaterial labour in the home. Because women can no longer guarantee the same quality of immaterial labour in the home, and because men were – on the whole – unwilling to cover or supplement this loss, capital saw an opportunity to commodify certain aspects of this labour. 'The grand offensive of the economic system was to produce machines that would supply services to replace at least in part the immaterial domestic labor that was no longer carried out, or that had been compressed' (Fortunati 2007, 149).

In other words, the contraction of women's immaterial labour becomes an opportunity for the extension of immaterial labour in productive labour in the form of 'intellective machines' in the home.

The time dedicated to communication, care, play, interaction, is taken over by, or shared with, various digital devices: computers, iPhones, iPods, interactive television, etc. However, this is not an extension of post-war technologies as 'baby-sitting devices' and family entertainment. Rather, there is an increasing conjunction between the use of these devices and the production of value: first, the large amounts of time spent on smart-phones and the Internet generating information and commercial content for providers, and secondly, in the case of computers and mobile phones, the expansion of immaterial labour as productive labour or non-productive labour into the domestic sphere – what Hardt and Negri have called famously the erosion of the distinction between dedicated labour time and leisure time. Consequently, women's (and men's) immaterial labour in the home has become 'increasingly mediated, self-reproductive and self-disciplinary' (Fortunati 2007, 151) as part of an extended working day. The waking cycle of reproduction/production–production/reproduction is subject continuously to the value-form.

This 'machinization of immaterial labour', and the extension of productive or non-productive labour as immaterial labour into the home, obviously is extraordinarily profitable for capital. Indeed, one of the problems capital faced under its post-1970s crisis of global profitability, and the rise of the new economy, was how to re-commodify the goods and labour constitutive of the domestic sphere. The refinement of 'labour-saving' white goods, had become exhausted, as their purchase cycle was an increasingly attenuated one. Digitalisation, then, provided, a key strategic entry into the domestic sphere, once more and more women became part of the workforce, and, consequently, were unable to sustain the same quality of provision of domestic immaterial labour. But, if the machinisation of immaterial labour has covered the ability of women with families to provide high-quality and constant immaterial labour in the home, this has not relieved the burden of domestic immaterial labour as such for women. On the contrary, the machinisation of immaterial labour has changed the focus of household management, care and affective support. If the penetration of productive and non-productive labour has produced a relative extension of the working day, the machinisation of domestic immaterial labour becomes a constitutive part of this additional labour: as the daily routines and purchases of the family are scheduled and organised via the computer and smart phone, the family becomes the productive adjunct to communication and information technologies. This has had a profound effect on the mediation of experience within the reproduction/production cycle. In order for domestic immaterial

labour to be commodified, it must be subject to a process in which time is 'stolen' from the producer. This is precisely what has happened with the mass mechanisation of immaterial labour; the increasing commodification of affect, care and communication within the home has been at the expense of non-commodified free time. 'By means of the device, people actually are expropriated of large slices of life in order to live out this second hand reality. *The real leap produced in this stage of the system is that it has gone from exploiting the labor force to expropriating the labor force of its very reality*' (Fortunati 2007, 151; emphasis added).

Now, of course, the expropriation and dematerialisation of the real under the commodity-become-image, has been central to thinking on late capitalism from Guy Debord and the Situationists to post-Operaism and Jean Baudrillard. But here the producer/consumer generates the conditions for their own disciplinary reproduction and exclusion from non-mediated experience. Enclosed in a continuous waking cycle of valorisation, he or she directly engages in the production of value across the traditional labour–leisure divide in order to 'stay in contact'. Operaism and post-Operaism once talked of the social factory, in which the disciplinary regime of value production entered all areas of social life, including cultural activities, creating the *operaio sociale* (socialised worker). But in this vision the subject of production could still distinguish what they did at work and what they did and consumed at home and in their leisure time (even if this free time involved the consumption of commodities). However, in this present stage of the mass mechanisation of immaterial labour, the reproduction/production cycle takes on a biopolitical character in which the subject gives over his or her whole being to the waking part of this cycle. In both production and reproduction (as extenuated production and digitalised immaterial labour), the worker subordinates all his or her free energy to digital communication, 'interaction' and consumption – what Christian Fuchs has called 'produsage'. Produsage 'can be interpreted as the outsourcing of productive labour to users who work completely for free and help maximize the rate of exploitation ($e = s/v$, surplus value / variable capital) so that profits can be raised and new media capital may be accumulated' (Fuchs 2011, 109), and as such is part of both the waged, and, most crucially, the non-waged, economy. The social consequence of this is an increased reliance not just on the mediated sign – which is unavoidable and therefore constitutive of any technologised modernity – but on mediated experience being drawn from an extraordinarily narrow regime of fantasy, entertainment and infotainment, in

which advertising, television, popular film and news form an enclosed circle. It is no surprise, then, that the rise of immaterial production has generated a new literature of the psychopathology of capitalism: the heightened substitution of technologically mediated experience for non-technologically mediated experience has produced an intensification of modes of distraction, withdrawal and alienation (see Berardi 2009; Mayer-Schönberger 2009; Salecl 2010).²

What is important about Fortunati's work is how much the category of immaterial labour is situated within the sexual and intellectual division of labour. The mechanisation of immaterial labour represents the disciplinary expansion of the domestic labour within the reproduction/production cycle. In the concept's translation into Lazzarato and Negri and post-Negrian post-Operatism, however, it takes on a far more sanguine character. This is not because the understanding of its forms has become more dialectical in these writers, but, on the contrary, because its claims to conceptual novelty are subject to a premature process of positivisation and universalisation – very much at odds with Fortunati – in which immateriality stands for a falsely conceived escape from, or undermining of, capitalist control. There is a terrible pathos, even sadness, to this political shift (see Graeber 2008): immateriality is given a kind of inflated anti-capitalist content – indeed universal creativity – at the expense of the hierarchies of the technical and sexual division of labour. As Hardt and Negri assert in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, the production of forms of communication, ideas and affects identifiable with immaterial labour is not particular to domestic labour, but has become 'hegemonic in qualitative terms' (Hardt and Negri 2005, 109) with the rise of post-Fordism – qualitative here meaning the prevailing tendency within the labour process for the informational, communicative and affective content of cognitive labour to *impose* itself on other forms of labour, productive and non-productive alike. Accordingly, they declare, it is no longer possible to talk of the real subsumption of labour at all. With the increasing reliance of productive and non-productive labour on intellectual and affective content, capital is unable fully to control the labour process in its own disciplinary interests, living labour as cognitive labour continually exceeding the means designed to measure it as a source of value. Indeed, the 'central forms of productive co-operation are no longer created by the capitalist as part of the project

2 As Salecl says (2010, 24): 'The more isolated we become from a real engagement with the social and political sphere, the more we are propelled toward self-mastery'.

to organise labour but rather emerge from the productive energies of labour itself' (Hardt and Negri 2005, 113). As a result, capital's attempt to control this immanent process of socialisation actually *weakens* the new conditions of productivity, delimiting their creative and affective potential and production of value. This is why Hardt and Negri argue, more broadly, that the cooperative character and flexibility of immaterial labour provides the basis for new forms of political self-management, gestating 'a kind of spontaneous and elementary form of communism' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 294).

The rise of the concept of immaterial labour in post-Negrian political theory and cultural theory, therefore, has had the success that it has had precisely because of this largely affirmative content: despite the defeat of the workers' movement under neoliberalism, workers' creativity and resistance continue to put capital on the defensive! This is why this sanguine vision of the breakdown between reproduction and production has been so fertile in the revival of the 1960s 'human capital' debate (Becker 1964) among post-digital management theorists and defenders of the revival of a new petty-bourgeois ideology of the 'independent' artisan (Florida 2002) – Negrian post-Operaism shares much with this new 'creative labour' thinking. As in Hardt and Negri's account of the new creative worker, Richard Florida identifies the dissolution of the boundaries between productive/non-productive labour and the cycle of reproduction as essentially a good thing, insofar as the self-disciplinary mechanisms it puts in place encourage various habits of creativity and self-initiative on and off the 'job' ('my labour power is a resource I should respect and develop in the interests of my own well-being'). Indeed, for Florida, the new conditions under which immaterial labour 'flourishes' creates a new grammar of self-reliance, encouraging the 'creative' worker to think of themselves as responsible for their own failings and shortcomings, and even sacking ('I must try harder'). In this respect, for Florida as much as for Hardt and Negri, creativity and capital are now merged in some uniquely novel and productive way – Florida claiming, in very elastic terms, that 38.3 million of the American work force are 'creatives' (Florida 2002). Where they differ, though, concerns how 'creativity' is conceived as constitutive of the labour–capital relation. For Florida, in the new economy the ideal of non-alienated, creative labour is no longer a utopian hope but has passed into the workplace; capital as such is in a position to secure the 'human flourishing' of the worker. For Hardt and Negri, capital is still the problem. But this is not because capital continues to secure the alienation of the worker, but

because it constantly prevents the creativity of the new work relations from achieving their emancipatory social content (what post-Operaism, borrowing from Marx in the *Grundrisse*, calls the 'general intellect').³ So, rather than 'creativity' being a condition of the new economy here and now, capital holds it back; in other words, the 'creativity' of the worker exceeds that of the interests of capital, and as such capital should be 'put to work' by workers. In fact, social and political antagonisms arise – or should arise – from workers' frustration at the creative shortfalls of the system. This wholly upbeat account of 'creativity' and the new labour regime, of course – devoid as it is of any reflection on the social and sexual division of labour and of class history – is what Internet providers, creative industry CEOs and HR offices, all want to hear, convinced, as they are, by the mantra of 'creative communication'. Thus, both Florida and Negrian post-Operaism, for quite different reasons, neglect in quite stupendous ways the *social objectivity of capital: the fact that labour power and therefore 'creativity' is functional to the value-form*.

Now, if this omission is to be wholly expected in Florida given his liberal remit (to get fund managers and city planners to tie capital accumulation to the new creative industries), in Negri, given his history as a revolutionary, it is bewildering. Hardt and Negri produce a strange, floating, phantasmatical account of immaterial labour. As the Aufheben group argue in 'Keep on Smiling – Questions on Immaterial Labour', the tendency in Hardt and Negri to define 'creative' labour as increasingly autonomous from capitalist control makes revolution and the emancipation of labour 'feasible and rational' (Aufheben 2006, unpaginated). Indeed, 'the future will simply be the completion of the present based on already existing conditions created by immaterial production now' (Aufheben 2006, unpaginated). In this sense, Hardt and Negri's account of immaterial labour is profoundly disabled by its disconnection between class struggle at the point of production and the technical and social division of labour. The would-be 'creativity' of immaterial labour is never subject to any fundamental assessment of skill-deskilling and alienation in relation to the technical division of labour, and, as such, the propensity of capital – even under post-Fordist conditions – to routinise the labour process, and where possible to strip out points or centres of worker autonomy and independent expertise. Florida likewise cannot see the non-creative forest for the creative trees. As Lazzarato says, in contradistinction to Florida, far from there being a general rise in creativity in production

3 For a short but useful discussion of Florida and post-Operaism, see Brouillette 2009.

(and even cultural production) there has been a 'neutralization of creation' (Lazzarato 2010, 12). Consequently, Lazzarato's assertion has much to do with what Aufheben call the 'fairytale' of the origins of immaterial labour in Negri and early Operaism, namely the notion that immaterial labour emerges primarily in response to the demands of workers for more flexible working methods (Aufheben 2006, unpaginated).

At one level, then, Operaism here makes a significant point: the increasing sabotage and interruption of the old factory system – certainly in Italy and France – made it difficult for capital to maintain highly bureaucratised top-down methods on the shop floor. But the advent of various participatory arrangements between workers and management, encouragement of network thinking on the shop floor, increased adoption of flexi-time, and the expansion of the creative and service industries (during the late 1970s and early 1980s), where some of these changes were facilitated, does not thereby mean that with the arrival of the digital economy and the rise of immaterial labour in the 1990s workers' resistance to Fordist industrialisation defines the new economy's relations and outcomes. On the contrary, what the new economy drives through is a new division of labour that continues, for the majority of workers, to recompose and devalue their existing skills. And this process is initiated and achieved precisely through the growing productivity of labour that occurs in the wake of the introduction of new machinery and the decomposition of the industrial labour force: fewer workers, producing more, more efficiently. So, far from immaterial labour being that which advanced workers 'win' from the crisis of Fordist industrialisation, it is the outcome of a profound reorganisation of the technical division of labour in the interests of class re-composition and labour-process efficiency. The rise of the service industry, therefore, is that domain of flexible and low-wage labour where the (digital) re-composition of labour was able to secure and advance its interests. But even if we dismiss, in Florida's terms, much of this service labour as heavily routinised – and as such a long-term problem for the new economy – the 'creativity' of other sectors does not add up. That is, however we compose the figures for 'creative and cognitive' workers across the system, the technical division of labour is always unravelling the claims to the autonomy of labour power. This is because immaterial labour is internal to, and an expression of, capital's self-valorisation. Therefore, whatever 'creative functions' are released or realised by the universal tool of the computer and new forms of cooperation in production, capital's need is to overcome workers' resistance in order to 'subsume, rationalise,

deskill and command labour' (Aufheben 2006, unpaginated). This is not because capital and its managers seek to discipline workers *as* workers (see Cohen 1987) – although bourgeois politics encourages and defends this – but because the labour process cannot transform itself into free labour, without destroying the labour–capital relation. The idea, therefore, that productive labour in its various immaterial forms and artistic labour have become interchangeable is a fantasy based on a familiar misrecognition of 'immateriality' as somehow free of the instrumentality and repetitions of material labour (a crucial misrecognition that I will discuss further, when we come to look at immateriality and art itself). And it is this that Lazzarato objects to: just as immateriality is embedded in, and as, material processes, immateriality is subject to the same downward pressures of the value-form as is material production.

Thus, if we take this as our guide, what distinguishes 'creativity' under the forms of immaterial labour is a fundamental division between the high quality production of ideas/models/designs etc. and their *execution* by the broad mass of cognitive workers. A small number of highly motivated and highly paid 'creatives' produce ideational content, which is then applied, performed, developed by others. Concomitantly, the production of 'knowledge' within these pre-given templates is made wholly unproblematic in conventional accounts, given the repetitive and pre-formatted nature of this labour, as if the designation 'knowledge worker' constituted some kind of liberation from the coercions of waged labour itself. As such, this division between skilled and unskilled immaterial labour has class struggle built into its very form; the creatives, richly rewarded, are assimilated within an expanded new middle class (indeed, see themselves as its vanguard) and the vast majority of cognitive labourers, poorly paid, are pulled back into what some theorists, such as Berardi, have called the 'cognitariat' (Berardi 2009). One extreme example of this split is the use of hand-held devices by Amazon warehouse workers which act as the 'eyes' and 'brain' of the worker on the move: these complex devices are the result of highly sophisticated design content, yet are used solely to monitor and discipline the performance of workers as they walk around Amazon's vast warehouses, in a kind of digital update of Alexander Gastev's Soviet institute of labour measurement. "They do not dawdle because the "devices in their hands are also measuring their productivity in real time." They walk between seven and 15 miles and everything they do is determined by Amazon's software. "You're sort of like a robot, but in human form," one manager [said]. "It's human automation, if you like" (Naughton 2013, 19). As such, the idea that living labour escapes

capitalist control under immaterial labour is belied by the huge efforts capital is currently employing to develop new forms of measurement (Caffentzis 2011).

But this clear division of interests between designers/idea managers and cognitive workers is not so straightforward across all sectors. The ideology of immateriality has been profoundly successful at incorporating the aspirations of the majority of immaterial workers into the petty bourgeois category of the creative class, precisely because informational labour is held to secure certain privileges over material (non-office) work. And this is why Hardt and Negri's 'broad universal theory' (Aufheben 2006, unpaginated) and its derivatives have had a substantive influence on this thinking, insofar as it gives political form to the idea that immateriality is in itself radical, and therefore the very means by which coercive or inert capitalist social relations and labour practices will be turned around. Indeed, once the anti-capitalist potentiality of immateriality is inflated in this way, struggle against the technical and sexual division of labour is made largely redundant, insofar as if immaterial labour is that which will secure the 'creative transformation' of capitalism, immaterial labourers have a shared set of interests.

A fundamental ideological carapace has attached itself to immaterial labour, therefore: immaterial labour has become a virtuous category in and of itself. Immateriality is the highest sphere of creativity under the post-Fordist economy; immaterial workers are the most radical or revolutionary; immateriality is the transformative key to capitalist inefficiency and hierarchy. This valorisation of knowledge production has its origins, then, in an old problem central to the labour-capital relation and the labour process: the split between intellectual and manual labour that historically has driven labour process theory and the debate on the emancipation of labour. Now, of course, the rise of immaterial labour has been premised precisely on the destruction of this opposition: more and more workers, it is claimed, are reliant on intellectual decision-making processes as part of their work, and therefore the division between intellectual labour and manual labour is no longer *structurally* determinate. But if, as Lazzarato suggests, immateriality *is* materiality, the split between intellectual skill and manual skill, as a problem about the worker's control over the pace and quality of the work process, remains no less in place. That is, the crucial issue is not that because more workers manipulate informational signs, and thereby, produce 'knowledge' or 'affects', that they, therefore, have more control over what they do. On the contrary, as we have seen, the opposite applies:

embedded in the technical and sexual division of labour, immaterial labour is no less subject to a generalised process of deskilling (in production) as the semi-skilled and manual aspects of the labour process. The ideological inflation of immaterial labour reinforces what the creative labour debate set out to escape: the notion that all forms of productive and non-productive labour, irrespective of their ideational content and execution, are subject to rationalisation and the demands of efficiency. The crucial point here is that immaterial labour misrecognises its own isomorphism with the coercions of manual labour, and therefore attaches a wholly unsupportable 'moral' character to its intellectual content. Moreover, this moral character, as we have seen in Florida, is perfectly attuned to bourgeois conceptions of the *post-class* character of generalised immaterial production, producing a skewed political investment in post-Operaism in immaterial labour's emancipatory potential.

But is this critique itself an ideological and reductive move? Is the acknowledgement of the constant re-rationalisation and deskilling of the labour process a way of actually failing to recognise the qualitative transformation that has indeed taken place within the new economy? To say that capitalism is pretty much the same as it has always been fails radically to assess the transformation in cultural forms through which exploitation, accumulation and surplus extraction continue to occur (see Kliman 2012 and Harman 2010)⁴ – just as to say that capitalism is no longer a disciplinary regime of value extraction in the old way is to make risible the historical continuity of capitalist exploitation. Value-production is not solely informational. Post-Fordism's expansion of just-in-time production is far less widespread than assumed. Something of the first objection attaches itself to Aufheben's critique. Yet, if we might want to question 'immaterial labour' as an explanatory category, nevertheless its range of referents point to a new stage in how and under what conditions the capital–labour relation is performed and reproduced. That is, immaterial labour maybe inflated as a critical category in Negri and others, but the dissolution of the boundaries between reproduction and production, as Fortunati asserts, makes immateriality the substance of an expanded cultural mediation. In other words, immateriality is also the means by which subjects and workers make general sense of the world of

4 In Harman's words (2010, 236): 'The most important factor in reviving profit rates was not computerisation, or, the reorganisation of capital as such, but the increased pressure capital was able to put on those who worked for it as successive waves of restructuring disrupted old patterns of working class resistance'.

(routinised) immateriality they inhabit. And this is certainly qualitatively different in this period of expanded technological mediation. This is why 'immateriality' has registered such a huge impact on the production and reception of art over the last 20 years: because art has itself become completely enculturalised as a result of the historical elision between artistic technique and general social technique (the prevailing level of technical skill and technological reproducibility, or *technik*). Art is no longer attached, in any fundamental sense, either to an artisanal medium (painterly or sculptural form) or to a fixed place (studio and gallery) – what in the early 1980s was widely referred to, following Rosalind Krauss, as art 'in the expanded field' (Krauss 1979).

Now, art is utterly normative as a range of practices and strategies *beyond* 'art in the expanded field'. And these practices, in their normalised 'expandedness', have of necessity, therefore, found themselves part of, or attached to, a range of disciplines and practices that function as external to art, insofar as expandedness has now largely become a set of extra-artistic research programmes and therefore wholly interdisciplinary in ambition. Consequently, this has meant expandedness has taken on a quite specific *economic* role, as artists' cognitive and immaterial labour is employed by various regeneration, art/architecture, environmental and public art schemes. Indeed, in the world of commissioned art projects, artistic labour finds itself increasingly exploited as abstract labour, waged labour. Not all artistic production, obviously, currently falls under this shift; similarly, artistic labour as free labour cannot be subject universally to capitalist real subsumption (for this to happen, art would thereby lose its function and status as art, dissolving any residual autonomy and non-equivalence it possesses as free labour). Yet, with this process of art's enculturalisation we are witness to a sharpening of artists' strategic, research and organisational skills as the constitutive basis of art's de-skilling-reskilling in the wake of post-conceptualism, allowing art to find other places, other *raisons d'être* for itself, that is, than those associated with modernism or even the postmodernism of Krauss's 'art in the expanded field' (which was attached essentially to the expanded syntax of sculpture). This has meant a profound absorption of artists' skills in an expanded circuit of art's production and reception (facilitated and enabled, of course, by the Internet and network culture generally) that, notionally at least, might be identifiable with immaterial or cognitive labour. Having written extensively on these changes recently (see Roberts 2010; 2011; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c), here I want to continue exploring the role and function of immaterial labour in post-Operatism,

as a way of re-constituting immaterial labour as the site of a specific problem for art. For what distinguishes the second wave of post-Operaist writing on immateriality is precisely its validity or inappropriateness within the debate on culture. So, below I want to continue to look at how immaterial labour as an inflationary (and deflationary) category has been played out in this literature, in particular Lazzarato and Virno.

Following his influential essay 'Immaterial Labour', there has been a decisive shift in Lazzarato's writing to questions of culture and art. In this respect, the culturalist content of his reading of immaterial labour is developed, in the spirit of post-Operaism generally, to cover what, in fact, was underdeveloped from the original essay: the cultural *implications* of immateriality's cultural expansion. That is, in 'Immaterial Labour' the cultural content of immateriality is confined specifically to a discussion of that majority or portion of affective or intellectual labour that constitutes the execution of a commodified service, or that majority or portion of intellectual/creative labour that constitutes the production of a material commodity: 'as regards the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labour involves a series of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion' (Lazzarato 1996b, unpaginated). In other words, the discussion of the cultural content of immateriality is confined in Lazzarato's essay to the familiar cultural-productive shift of the last 30 years: the rise of the informational economy as the dominant employment sector in most European countries and North America.

What Lazzarato does not discuss, however, is how this shift is played out in the para-technological/para-informational transformation of art and culture during this period (a discussion that has generated a huge literature recently, quite independent of the immaterial labour debate) and that has its origins in early postmodernism's discussion of the technological image. In what ways has art become cultural in the image of productive and non-productive labour 'becoming cultural'? In what ways is the post-artisanal labour of the contemporary artist a reflection of, or part of, the enculturalisation of the service industries? In this respect, with Lazzarato, as with Berardi and Virno, there is a discernable turn to the function and identity of art as a repositioning of post-Operaism within the debate on the aesthetic and the emancipation of labour, something that was largely missing from Mario Tronti's and Raniero Panzieri's Operaism. The result – certainly recently in Lazzarato – is a double kind of move: on the one hand, a political and economic

deflation of immaterial labour as a universalising category of economic transformation, and on the other, an inflation of various kinds of cultural transformation that appear to operate and have meaning in the wake of the rise of immaterial labour. This shift is, I believe, productive (within limits), insofar as it recognises immateriality-as-materiality as the mediatory substance of the digitalised commodity-form, whilst at the same time displacing and relativising the notion that we now solely inhabit an informational economy and that cognitive labour is the primary source of value production. One does not imply the other.

One of the first casualties of this disjunction is, indeed, the political subjectification of immateriality as an emancipatory category. It is precisely because immaterial labour is split apart by the technical and sexual division of labour that its conceptual elasticity is utterly implausible as a political category: in fact, in this sense, it is one of those indeterminate categories, like 'population', which Marx attacks for its weak universality in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1993). 'Today', Lazzarato argues, 'we don't subjectify each other as immaterial workers and that's another reason the concept doesn't work' (Lazzarato 2010, 13). This leaves the way for a comparable deflation of immaterial labour in artistic practice: artistic labour is not just a matter of the intellectual organisation of signs (as in digital practice), nor are the use-values of artistic labour under the expansion of immaterial labour simply an extension of the service economy. Lazzarato sees this displacement, correctly, as a way of not only 're-materialising' the labour of the cognitive worker but also re-functioning the identity of the worker along with that of the artist. And this is why what we might want to retain from post-Operaism here is its reconnection of labour process analysis and the debate on the emancipation of labour to the debate on artistic labour and aesthetics, echoing the classical terrain of Constructivism and Productivism: *the worker becoming artist, and the artist becoming worker*. What do we want art and labour to become? In this light, Lazzarato takes his cue from the Intermittents, a group of contemporary French artists-activists.

Inserting themselves directly within the contemporary immaterial conditions of artistic production, the Intermittents seek the most inclusive account of what it is to be an artist today: artists are largely technical operatives, they declare, producers within an extended division of labour. Yet at the same time they refuse to refer to themselves as cognitive or immaterial labourers, partly because they recognise that what they do is still attached to free artistic labour, but also, specifically, because the designation artist comes with a residual critical distance that is absent

from commodified immaterial labour. Artistic labour therefore cannot be subverted in any false and sentimental identification with productive labour as such, for to do so is morally to inflate the intellectual content of immaterial labour. I have described this situation as essentially one for art, in which the residual critical identity of the artist is played out through the capacity of the artist to move across practices and disciplines and skill-bases without professionally investing in them (see Roberts 2010). Indeed, it is this liminal condition of artistic labour that distinguishes it from productive and non-productive labour and, therefore, from the notion that art's immaterial content is increasingly subsumed by the cultural demands of the new service industry. Yet, if Lazzarato acknowledges this gap in a later essay – 'Art does not actively pass into life, nor does it hold itself in splendid autonomy' (Lazzarato 2008, 29) – he misses the opportunity to defend this dialectically, preferring to deflate the category of the artist as such: 'how do we avoid using *artist* as a category?' (Lazzarato 2010, 13) The argument here being that if immaterial labour cannot secure any worthwhile political subjectification (across the technical and class divide), nevertheless, the mass intellectuality that is put in train culturally by immateriality means that the specialist designation 'artist' invariably shifts to the side of the worker, as creative potential.

As I have pointed out though, through my analysis of the technical division of labour, this creative mass intellectuality is subject to a narrow range of functions and possibilities, leaving the notion of its production of counter-subjectivities, from inside its delimited and pathologised spaces, fraught with all the old problems around mass culture and ideology: just because you can use and interact with new media, and indeed produce your own content, it does not mean that the state-technology-dominant ideology nexus, once brilliantly mapped out by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt in the early 1970s, is thereby resolved in the creative interests of users and certainly not in those of proletarian users (Kluge and Negt 1993 [1972]).

In other words, there is nothing to be gained by giving up on the designation of artist as avant-gardist in the current period and, as such, of art as a space of non-equivalence, insofar as the avant-garde represents the necessary placeholder for this gap between heteronomy (life; the 'everyday') and autonomy and, therefore, stands in for the continuing notion of art's powers of negation. The artist's contribution to the debate on the labour process, therefore, is not just connected to the possible identification between artists and non-artists (workers; technicians),

but *to the critique of productive labour itself*; any commitment to the isomorphism between the immaterial labour of art and productive immaterial labour is unable to do this. In other words, autonomy in art has to be won from both the new conditions of art's cultural immateriality *and* art's non-equivalence with abstract labour, and this is why the identity of art with free labour remains a fundamental critical and political resource in the pursuit of this (insofar as artworks are intellectually grounded commodities produced by free labour non-subsumable under abstract labour). To cede the space of the avant-garde's negation and non-equivalence is simply to increase the pressures of waged labour on art's post-conceptual immateriality. Lazzarato's diffusion and dispersal of art into mass intellectuality, then, weakens this autonomy by tying production and meaning too closely to a uniformly dispersed model of creativity and to an internalist politics of aesthetic interruption that is little different from the critical postmodernism of the 1980s and 1990s. In his words: 'In order to express oneself artistically and in general with societies of security it is necessary to interrupt communication, to neutralize the signifying power of language. Words are wielded as weapons to open breaches in consensus and in the semiotic pollution that besets us' (Lazzarato 2008, 29). Yes, undoubtedly, but how is this negation to be framed? Within a totalising critique of the value-form and capitalist relations? Or, within a logic of transversality and nomadism that invites art into the creative industries through the back door? Lazzarato would seem to favour some version of the latter.

Virno, in many respects, offers the same kind of vision and analysis, albeit from a perspective in which politics and art have little or no intellectual correspondence.

Avant-garde art proved the impotence, the inadequacy, the disproportion of the old standards through a formal investigation. The common ground of art and social movements is never about content. Art that relates to social resistance is beside the point, or rather art expressing views on social resistance is not relevant. The radical movement and poetry [aestheticized activity more generally] touch on the formal investigation that yields an index of new ways of living and feeling which results in new standards. (Virno 2009 [Lavaert and Gielen], unpaginated)

That is, if Lazzarato imagines the gap between heteronomy and autonomy as filled with a dispersed generalised creative resistance (that traverses the technical realm of productive labour and artistic free labour), for

Virno the struggle for art now is finding the best or most suasive relations between generalised creativity – or the general intellect – and artistic or expressive singularity. The gap between heteronomy and autonomy, therefore, is filled by the possibility of a *generalised singularity*: ‘the question we now face is: What aesthetic and political experiences can we develop to transfer from the universal to the general without consequently destroying the particular’ (Virno 2009 [Lavaert and Gielen], unpaginated). Hence, far from art finding new quarters in an extended political process, the political promise of the gap lies in art’s *formal* non-equivalence with political praxis, placing a heightened emphasis upon art’s dis-organisational aesthetic qualities and attributes. In other words, art’s ‘politics’ provides a quality of ‘dismeasure’, or excess, within the realm of generalised creativity: it is precisely the connection between aesthetic disorganisation and dispersed creativity – ‘I see creativity as diffuse, without a privileged centre’ (Virno 2009 [Lavaert and Gielen], unpaginated) – that constitutes art’s new generalised field of political engagement. In these terms, Virno offers a revised Adornian autopoiesis: by coming down on the side of autonomy against heteronomy he sees the singularities of art as the prefigurative content of emancipated labour. But if he rightly aligns the gap between autonomy and heteronomy to art’s necessary construction and inhabitation of ‘empty spaces’ – spaces culturally un-colonised by capital (Virno 2009 [Lavaert and Gielen], unpaginated) – the potential dismeasure of this gap is squeezed from the opposite direction. That is, Virno’s rhetoric of dismeasure is frustratingly disconnected from the generalised intellectuality – or immateriality – of post-conceptual art practice itself that actually might make this gap viable. The interdisciplinary, extra-institutional and research programme conditions of art that I have identified with ‘art after art in the expanded field’ are narrowed for fear of their heteronomous (political) character.

In assessing the relationship between immateriality, art and autonomy, then, we are very much left with a problem that cuts across various attempts to articulate the relationship between politics and art today: *What is realistically promised by the gap between autonomy and heteronomy under art’s ‘suspensive’ condition?* Post-Operaism rightly argues that the generalised conditions of creativity – their molecular dissemination in Virno’s Guattarian language – are the ground of art’s measure and dismeasure. The identification between the bohemian (Western) metropolitan enclave and art’s (modernist) artisanal resistance to general intellect and general social technique is long gone. But Lazzarato and Virno fail to identify the production and inhabitation of this gap, as a

source for the non-relational and negative content of art as an open-ended sequence of 'thought experiments' and research programmes. Virno and Lazzarato fail to address the 'immaterial' revolution of art itself since the late 1970s. That is, the conceptualisation of art – from the 1920s – not only establishes a fundamental disconnection between the production of art and the singular authorship of the artist but also extends intellection into the relations of artistic production itself. Indeed, both converge at various points during and after the historic avant-garde, most obviously in conceptual art. The generalised outcome of this is not the transformation of art into research, as the detractors of 'idea' art after conceptual art like to put it, but a fully conscious recognition of artists as thinkers and art as a reasoned (rule following/rule breaking) activity. This, in turn, has at various points presumed a totalising critique of capitalist relations, as artistic labour has defined itself against productive labour, as *not-of* capital. Thus any post-conceptual theory of art that attaches itself to the concept of immateriality and generalised creativity needs to recognise this in order to avoid the collapse of its premises into a spontaneous philosophy of dismeasure, in which excess is permanently attached to an aestheticised micropolitics of resistance. Yet, despite both Virno's and Lazzarato's concerted attempt to expel the vitalist tendencies of post-Operaism in their respective critiques of Negrian affirmationism, this spontaneity invariably returns.

Indifferent Agent: Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital

Marina Vishmidt

The proposition ‘speculation as a mode of production’ is intended to set the terms of an inquiry into how art and of labour start to draw closer together in recent decades, as systems of value become more and more abstract. The relation between art and labour, as two contrary social forms – one predicated on uselessness and the other on a social use-value – undergoes a shift as exchange-value and the immanence of abstract value increasingly determine the conditions of production and experience for both. Here, we need to consider the relationship between an objective logic of speculation and the kinds of subjectivity it produces. The speculative subject, whether of aesthetics or labour power, is key to understanding how the current model of social reproduction in capitalism – a mode that has been defined in terms of ‘fictitious capital’ or a ‘double decoupling’ between labour and capital (Simon 2011, 98) – sees a re-orientation of art and labour away from the discrete terrains set out for them by a previous mode of accumulation. The logic of self-expanding value, structural to capitalist accumulation, is modified into a worker-facing ideology couched in notions such as ‘creativity’ or ‘human capital’, notions which traverse the norms of labour and artistic (non-) labour alike as both are re-crafted in the image of capital – that is, as entrepreneurship and as forms of activity without content (and thus, without a principal distinction between them). This is the tendency I am designating as ‘speculative’.

Delineating the specific form of subjectivity that belongs to speculation as a mode of production calls upon an understanding of subjectivity as

a thoroughly social rather than a psychological or individual category – an ‘objective’ subjectivity that should be read from as well as against its social conditions of possibility. Here, ‘subjectivity’ can also be seen as an objectivity which becomes internalised, and thus individualised. We can see this in the fetish-character of the individual in capitalist modernity. The liberal notion of the individual is by definition a being under-determined by, and primary to, social and historical processes. However, it can be argued that the dividing line between subjectivity and objectivity itself is an index of social and historical process (Endnotes 2010, 79). The category of ‘subjectivity’ is useful because it enables us to think about the repressed politics in a dominant notion of ‘creativity’ which models subjectivity on self-valorising value in line with the social dominance of self-valorising value as modelled by financialised capital (McNally 2009, 56). This brings us to an essentially ‘economic’ concept of creativity, with the entrepreneurial bearer of this subjectivity as the ‘bearer’ or manager of one’s own ‘human capital’. The concept of ‘human capital’ does not, however, exhaust the story of *how* the open-ended contingency of social creativity becomes reconciled with value in the production of subjects who see themselves in those terms. We could also think of this assumed reconciliation using concepts like ‘real subsumption’, which would enable us to track how subjectivity is ‘invested’ by capital both through developments in the production process and ‘outside’ it, that is, in areas such as biopolitical state welfare, culture and law – all that in orthodox Marxist theory would fall into the ‘reproductive’ sphere.

The account of the emergence of human capital as this kind of ‘capitalisation of the human’ needs to be supplemented with an account of the ‘humanisation of capital’ corollary to the precepts of creative work, creative management and arts-led economic strategies native to the ‘creative industries’ discourse which, though having reached its peak about a decade ago, continues to provide the chief model for speculative development in post-industrial economies. My approach follows critical aesthetics and value-form theory, which dictate a negative traversal and inhabitation of such ‘economistic’ notions for their contradictions and traces of the material conditions that inhere in their abstraction. However, I am also interested in certain concepts from Marxist autonomist theory for their proximity to, as well as their distance from, such a project. Thus I am interested, without committing to a fuller exploration here, in the post-Operaist debates around ‘immaterial labour’ and the ‘general intellect’. Insofar as these debates fail adequately to link their accounts of

capital to their accounts of production historically rather than ontologically, they can echo certain aspects of the affirmation of creativity (and the discursive negation of labour) in the discussions of the 'creative industries', albeit for very different theoretical and tactical reasons. Such a tendency is a danger courted by, for example, the Spinozist and Nietzschean tenor of autonomous social production in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Negri 1991; Hardt and Negri 2000; 2005; 2009). It is, however, a thread that arguably runs through all the work influenced by Marxist autonomist thought, since it stakes much on the liberation of labour from capital, rather than the need to establish another set of social relations where neither of these categories will exist, much less dominate over the other.

This still quite simplistic articulation of the projects of negation of labour in 'creative' discourse as well as the negation of labour through a negation of capital in libertarian communist theory bring us to an important but often neglected parallel track in this discussion: the aesthetic project of negation. Here we can initially discern the role played by labour in the tradition of post-Kantian Romantic aesthetics. In this 'aesthetic project', we see the sublation of labour in 'free activity' in Romantic aesthetics, rather than in capital, as in the critique of political economy. With German Romantic aesthetic theory, up to and including the Marxian variants of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, and arguably even in Marx's discussion of art, there is a cancellation of labour by a notion of 'free activity' which art prefigures. In both cases, there is a tension between overcoming and sidestepping the domination of abstract value in order to attain emancipation from labour.

The post-Romantic tradition of critical aesthetics charts the disjunction between labour and freedom in a dialectical vision of human autonomy, that is, the dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy (Bürger 1984 [1974]; Bernstein 1992). In this corpus, human freedom cannot result from the appropriation of humanity's productive powers from capital, since labour is understood as always unfree or compulsory, counterpoised to play or mimesis as the definitively human (though here the concept of the 'human' is a historical rather than a positive one) capacity for free and purposeless creation. Here, there is a suggestive crossover between the critique of labour in critical and Marxist aesthetics, and the critique of labour in Marxist value-form theory, with exponents such as Isaac Rubin, Moishe Postone and Christopher Arthur, as well as the writers of the 'communalisation current' that depart from value-form theory, such as the Endnotes group (Endnotes 2010; Heinrich 2012; Rubin 1972

[1928]; Postone 1993; Arthur 2004). The crossover can be described as a common rejection of a positive concept of use-value or of labour which can be extracted from the social relations of capital; use-value is an aspect of value, and labour is always an aspect of value-determined labour, or, 'abstract labour' – the generic category for the social institution of wage-labour in a capitalist society, indifferent as to the content of the labour. In the simplest possible terms, abstract labour refers to *labour as human capacity in general*. As opposed to that, concrete labour is the labour required for, and invested in, a specific work activity. Abstract labour is the socially necessary labour (socially necessary for the reproduction of that society, not in some naturalistic or transhistorical way) that allows commodities to be exchanged since the abstract labour they all contain is the equivalence which can be measured in money, and is thus at the basis of value.¹

In the analysis that interests us here, 'abstract labour' is the category through which we can think through how artistic production and subjectivity are becoming more continuous with other kinds of work in their creative disposition, flexibility and indifference to content of the work as long as the gesture attains artistic 'value' in the semiotic and financial marketplace where that gesture is validated. At the same time, this kind of ideal and material continuity (material in the sense that artists increasingly participate in circuits of valorisation which are not, institutionally speaking, artistic – for example, as waged as creative professionals in policy contexts), which seems to denote art's proximity to capitalist equivalence, threatens the distinctiveness of art's specific value structure in capitalism, that is, the production of alternatives to equivalence, non-fungibility and singularity as signs and as forms of life – a value structure that historically has allowed gestures of individual and systemic critical defiance as well as more ambiguous forms of complicity. In this sense, we can discuss the role of art in capitalism as a systemic 'negation of labour' as it is practised elsewhere in the socio-economy. Before seeing how this is shifting and changing in the current period,²

1 The distinction between abstract and concrete labour originates in Marx 1859.

2 In a period when there is no clear political or economic replacement for an ever more destructive capitalist relation, the loss of art's distinctiveness from capitalist value forms – including labour – can only ever be a 'capitalist realism', with reference to both Mark Fisher's coinage (Fisher 2009) and the mimetic portrayals which played the role of Pop Art in the West Germany of the 1960s, famously dubbed as such by Gerhard Richter.

we would then need to unpack further the political and historical implications of this term.

The 'negation of labour' perspective, further, recurs in the thought of Italian Operaism as 'refusal of work', most saliently in the work of Mario Tronti (Wright 2002). We can thus juxtapose the critique of labour deriving from critical aesthetics with the critique of labour in critical political economy and Marxist philosophy on their common ground of a dialectics of negation. From this perspective, 'speculation as a mode of production' can also start to describe a mode of conceptual production whose impetus is to find the 'speculative' aspect of every concept. This is not simply to deploy the dialectic as a speculative mode of thought, but to intensify the speculative potential of every category based on its materialisations in the real practices which are grouped under those categories. Categories such as art, labour, value, subsumption, autonomy, heteronomy, negation – all these are speculative categories rather than descriptions of self-sufficient kinds of social practice or concept formation. They are thus incomplete and open to re-articulation in the concrete historical situation. This echoes the structure of thinking set out by Theodor W. Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* (1990 [1966]) where objects will always exceed their concepts, and no final synthesis can be expected.

In his book *Aesthetic Theory* (2004 [1970]), Adorno deployed the Kantian aesthetic categories of autonomy and heteronomy in a strong sense, which is to say, to outline the social content of the specificity art has acquired in the modern era. These are the terms that frame the enquiry into the constitutive bind of art as being both like and unlike socially necessary labour in capitalism. Art as a realisation of freedom as posed by critical aesthetics discloses its implicit contradiction – its denial of labour – but also that this contradiction cannot be eradicated by 'socialising' art or dissolving its distinction from labour. That's because art does contain a yet-abstract freedom from capitalist work, capitalist time and capitalist value, a freedom only accessible through and despite its commodity status. This commodity status is posited as the condition of its critical distance (Adorno 2007). What happens to this dialectic under the conditions of industrialised, or unsocially socialised, creativity? Further, what happens if the opposite pole to art in this critical tradition – labour – declines as a category of political and economic affirmation, though by no means does it decline as an ideological and economic necessity for individuals? Does the specificity of art and labour as distinct forms of social production decline as well?

Art has been asking these questions, especially the last one, for some

time already. It could even be suggested, as critics like Kerstin Stakemeier have, that such a boundary-blurring is what differentiates contemporary art from modern art, in large part due to art's changing and increasingly commercial conditions of production and consumption. Theorists such as Jacques Rancière, on the other hand, would call the dissolution between art and its others the central feature of the 'aesthetic regime', predicated on mixing the high and low, the decorative and the applied, the dramatic and the prosaic, the artistic and the political. Yet other writers, such as Sabeth Buchmann or Helen Molesworth, locate the reflexivity of post-conceptual art precisely in its tendency to trouble settled categories of artistic and economic activity, in line with the 'de-materialisation' and feminisation of labour that preceded and continued into the 'neoliberal' and 'globalised' capitalism of the last few decades (Stakemeier 2013; Rancière 2004; 2009; 2010; 2013; Buchmann 2006; Molesworth 2003). Taking these currents into account, it seems imperative to clarify the question of labour for, and within, art as its central political question, and, conversely, what the speculative praxis of art might have to say to the politics of labour. An outline for such an argument could go like this: the passage through labour for art and the passage through art for labour are equally crucial in their potential to trigger reflexive negations. These would be the negations of practice and the subjects generated from practice, rather than the ongoing negation of the difference between art and labour via changing conditions for extracting value which tend to drive all forms of activity to the homogeneity of the commodity. We can say here that if the creative subject of labour needs to traverse the de-subjection, formalism and illegitimacy of artistic activity, artistic production needs to traverse the negativity and constraint of abstract labour as its own most intimate parameter.

Artistic labour

Apposite here would be to theorise the conditions of possibility for an 'art worker' and to reformulate them in terms of the negativity inherent in the indeterminacy of generic creativity as the new rule for labour; or, in terms recognisable to Adorno, the negativity that marks autonomy as the scar of its break with the heteronomous. An initial approach could be to see what happens if we try and re-figure art as itself a kind of 'abstract labour' under conditions of generalised 'creativity', or, as I have been putting it, 'speculation'. When it comes to figuring the proximity between art and labour, the commodity-form of art and the

commodity-form of labour power have to be elucidated prior to seeing in what sense it is possible to speak of both art and labour power in their social character of abstract labour. However, we have to keep in mind the difficulty of re-defining art as a form of abstract labour due to its incompatibility with hallmarks of abstract labour such as the wage-form and capitalist production process. However, I will contend that in order to bring the critique of capitalist productive relations in critical aesthetics into the present social and economic configuration, *art could be viewed as a form of abstract labour* – and thus part of abstract labour's negativity in capital. This could permit art to perform the critical function imputed to it by critical aesthetics effectively *in a situation where art and labour no longer stand in opposition*. Here, the proximity of 'art' and 'abstract labour' demonstrates the potential of holding them both as speculative categories in the sense I indicated above.

Yet I will also be hedging my bets slightly. In addition to the attempted re-formulation of art as abstract labour, I will also approach the elision between art and labour from the standpoint of the value-form more broadly. This can be depicted in terms of a link between the expansion of the category of art and the expansion of the value-form in the dynamics of social production and reproduction in recent times. Such an expansion, I will argue, is an index of *the crisis in the relations of production* that have kept art and labour separate, a separation that can no longer hold, once that crisis is considered not just a general malfunctioning of a discrete logic of valorisation called 'finance' but a crisis in the capital-labour relation more generally.

Autonomy and real abstraction

So what could be the specific type of negation performed by art vis-à-vis labour in a society dominated by the abstraction of value? If in recent years labour has been re-fashioned as 'creativity' and the creative gyrations of finance have become the primary engines of accumulation, we have also witnessed art as in no previous period assimilated into the economy. Art is assimilated not purely as ornament or market commodity but as *a structure of legitimation for contemporary forms of exchange*, not just a market but a 'structure of feeling' that lends an emancipatory valence to the tyranny of markets, and the ever more predatory landscape of social relations they create. The accepted modernist form of the negation of the *status quo* performed by art in opposition to labour in a capitalist society (that art is autonomous, an ensemble of activities done for its

own sake, while labour is heteronomous, done for extrinsic ends) can no longer hold, even in the rigorously dialectical version proposed by Adorno. With speculation as a mode of production, the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy becomes insufficient because autonomy acquires a new instrumentality in heteronomy: it becomes a style or an affect directly plugged into a luxury and service economy, rather than a structural opposition in capitalist value relations. In a scene of generalised speculation, art emerges as the emblem of reconciliation between ideas of subjective freedom and the freedom of capital.

Adorno's version of the autonomy of art goes as follows: the separation of art and labour must have deep roots in how both of these social forms relate to the commodity. These contradictions then should be located at the heart of the social character of art itself, which emerges as an uneven topology of autonomy and heteronomy – autonomy understood as art's immanence to its own laws, and heteronomy as social determinations external to those laws. In the essay 'Art, Society, Aesthetics', Adorno makes a few statements along these lines, statements that posit art as a constitutive exclusion to, for example, the 'profane world' of productive relations and instrumental reason: 'Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not. The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other' (Adorno 2007, 3). What this implies is that for 'the demands of a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics' proposed by Adorno to be fulfilled, there has to be an idea of a strong, yet contingent and incomplete, relationship between art objects and the social ground against which they are defined, (precisely, *against* which they are defined). For him, art is a form of social labour that is intimately connected to productive labour by its detachment from it, and by the conditions that perpetuate that separation as a norm: 'Yet, it is precisely as artifacts, as products of social labour, that they [artworks] also communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content' (5). Art is symptomatic in its capacity to both disclose and disavow the cancelling of human agency or creativity that obtains in a totally administered world under the rule of the commodity-form, a role which has to be historicised, as should be the categories of 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy'. This paradoxical position of art *both affirming and denying* the loss of social or subjective agency in the rest of human praxis is summed up in this way: 'By virtue of its rejection of the empirical world – a rejection that inheres in art's concept and thus is no mere escape, but a law immanent to it – art sanctions the

primacy of reality' (2). Further, '[t]he idea of freedom, akin to aesthetic autonomy, was shaped by domination, which it universalized. This holds true as well for artworks' (23). Succinctly, artworks (or the experience of a separate realm of human activity called art) critique commodity relations by being apart and unlike those relations. Yet by being apart and unlike, artworks also forsake the claim to any power to affect the universal reach of those relations.

But this paradoxical position is not simply the site of a conceptual tension; it is also a real contradiction, and this holds insofar as art needs to be apprehended as a particular type of commodity, one both like and unlike the commodity labour power, for example. This particularity inheres in artworks' singularity, a singularity secured through their mode of production (artisanal, as opposed to industrial) and not subsumed to the technical division of labour native to mass production and waged labour. Such singularity is also secured through the artworks' production being determined by artistic subjectivity rather than social objectivity, and their status, at least principally, as un-reproducible and hallowed by the mark of original authorship. These are an artwork's conditions of autonomy, which should perhaps be better spelled out as *the artistic mode of production's conditions of autonomy*, so as to keep in clearer focus the dependence of these conditions on what they reject: the heteronomy of productive labour.

Here it is vital to distinguish the role of autonomy in conditioning discrete art practices in the recent or 'contemporary' period from its role with regard to the field of art as a whole. While contemporary art (from the 'neo-avant-garde' of the 1960s onwards) has been very much about critically interrogating artistic autonomy and highlighting art's interpenetration with and dependence on conditions outside the limits of the art object (heteronomy), from art institutions to the larger parameters of existence such as time, weather, land, media, narrative, the body, experience, and recently the economy, as well as labour, the various ways of dramatising these dependencies and entanglements have relied on the relative autonomy of art as a totality: art is sustained as a distinct realm of semiotic and productive methods which is regulated by immanent laws and can in no way be conflated with any of the conditions it increasingly incorporates (Vishmidt 2008, 21–34). Rather, art's ability to incorporate or emulate those conditions, challenging autonomy on a 'micro'-scale is guaranteed by the durability of that autonomy on a 'macro'-scale, which itself tends to play a reproductive role with regard to the conditions interrogated.

As such, the autonomy of art in modernity – that is, roughly from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century – is the autonomy of the fetish, liable to play down the dependent conditions of this autonomy and displace them into a reified self-sufficiency. John Roberts, glossing Adorno, summarises the special commodity status of art as follows: '[b]ecause unreproducible artworks are not subsumable under the law of value, paradoxically, they transcend their own status as commodity fetishes by becoming, in a sense, bloated and absolute kinds of fetish, absolute commodities'. This is despite the fact that 'the freely sensuous, unreproducible artwork secures an image of liberated labour' (Roberts 2007, 30). The dialectic of liberated labour has a further dimension when it comes to art: the artwork always refers beyond itself, to a non-purposeful or liberated time in which the division of labour and commodity relations cease to have effect; labour power also is always more than it is, since it produces more value than it consumes and, as living labour, always exceeds its condition as objectified, value-producing labour. With reference to Marx's discussion of labour as 'not-value' (Marx 1993, 295–96), as subjectivity which exists in a state of negativity to its valorisation – and eradication as labour – by capital, we can see art as the reification of this negativity. Its constitutive separation from capital's law of value in its mode of production puts it at once outside the conditions of labour and capital, and ensures that it is traversed by its dependency on both. This problematic separation is summed up by Adorno in these terms: 'Art exists in the real world and has a function in it, and the two are connected by a large number of mediating links. Nevertheless, as art it remains the antithesis of that which is the case' (Adorno 2007, 159).

If we take 'that which is the case' to be capitalist social relations, it is clear that art exists as an antithesis to subsumed (waged) labour, as a free space for experiment and fantasy conducted within agreed-upon parameters, although these parameters are increasingly contested, and have been for some decades already, as outlined above. By means of this reified separation from wage-labour, art can be considered a surplus of negativity in relation to 'that which is the case' (art's social use is always in question, unlike that of labour) compared to the negativity already ascribed to labour in and against capital, a negativity which can only be realised politically. Nonetheless, it is precisely this surplus of negativity which is diluted or converted into a positivity when 'creativity' becomes the condition for all wage-labour as, in the past few decades, it is tendentially subsumed to finance, emulating finance's mechanism of valorisation. As a result, art merges with its other, abstract labour: not just with regard to

a specious creativity as a demand imposed on contemporary work, but by way of the routinisation and industrialisation imposed on art production itself through its embedding in collector-driven markets and luxury industries, but also social policy initiatives and urban development. If art as a mode of speculative praxis can be demonstrated to imaginatively radicalise the speculation performed by capital in its financial modalities, which remains tethered to the self-expanding form of value, we will get an idea of whether it is meaningful to speak of art as 'subsumed' to either of these heteronomous conditions, and what the critical implications of this might be in the current period.

Art as counterproductive labour

So far we have sought to track the intersections and divergences between art and finance as forms of speculation which both disavow labour and highlight the practical and even ontological 'contingency' of value. Now I will go on to discuss an artwork that takes on some of these questions performatively: labour in a financial services context rendered speculative by its extended, and indeterminate, performance. Pilvi Takala's 2008 video *The Trainee* depicts the Finnish artist embarking upon a placement with the international accountancy firm Deloitte. Initially undertaking the standard array of tasks expected of this role, her behaviour starts subtly to shift over time, to the perplexity of her colleagues. After several months, she no longer undertakes any tasks. But instead of enacting a *Bartleby*-like stance of existential refusal in the workplace, Takala is actually attempting to live up to the tenets of unfettered creativity held forth by the rhetoric of the 'managerial revolution', the spontaneous and ungovernable value creation that each company must learn how to foster in its employees if it wants to stay ahead of the game. She spends her days sitting at her desk staring into space. Inquiries meet with responses like 'I am thinking' or 'I'm doing brain-work right now'. Occasionally she rides up and down in the lift for hours, explaining to curious interlocutors that her thought processes flow better in a dynamic environment. The artist seems to be dramatising or parodying the capitalisation of attention as labour which has been written about extensively in theories of post-Fordism, along with the 'virtuosity' explored by Paolo Virno (Virno 2003).

All this brings art as the suspension of labour and labour as the suspension of creativity closer together to the point of indistinction, flowing into a common mode of 'process over product'. In *The Trainee*

art acts as a magnifying lens for the suspension of labour as integral to the actuality of contemporary work: the disposition, the readiness to work, is already the chief affective and subjective requirement of today's abstract labour (Gilligan in Holert 2012, 84–98). Thinking might already be labour, might already be attention subsumed to the regime of valorisation, but it might also be just thinking, or nothing. It is clear that Takala's on-the-job performance did not serve to advance her accountancy career (this might have also pertained to her lowly status as trainee – perhaps had she attained to an executive post, her claim to be 'thinking' as work might have been given more credence).

While it is not uncommon for motifs appropriated from, or emulating, the world of labour to infiltrate art over the past few decades, if not much earlier in the century with the revolutionary avant-gardes, Takala's piece is one which tries to represent the changes to the experience and expectations of work in recent times – which can be summed up as its *unrepresentability*, its loss of definition. Takala's action – a performance of the indistinction between art and labour that transpires both in the workplace and in her art practice – also rehearses *the logic of transit between the visibility and invisibility of the art object*, the art 'instance', which has characterised conceptual art and the practices that can be placed in its trajectory. It has been characterised by this equally to a mimetic tendency with regard to non-artistic labour, and it is perhaps in its concrete engagements with labour (as well as with money) that the speculative logic of (conceptual and post-conceptual) art that appears in withdrawing and disappears when it is displayed is most sharply enunciated. Parenthetically, Takala had agreed the project with the marketing manager but this information was not communicated to any of her colleagues. They, in turn, would invariably express their confusion and distress in emails to the manager behind her back; emails which are reproduced as part of the documentary installation of the piece (Westcott 2012). The visibility of her invisible work was disquieting to her co-workers; one must be seen to be doing something, and they could not tell what it was she was doing, or if she was doing anything. 'What is she doing there? *Arbeiten? Oder Theater?*' This is what speculative labour looks like: nothing. Or art. Her literal take on 'job performance' was putting into question the necessity of their own roles.

This speculative gesture recalls the role of the 'market-making' trader in the writing of the financial engineer and speculative realist theorist Élie Ayache. He proposes that the trader's subjective, physical presence is indispensable, even if it is only in manipulating and writing the

equations for high-frequency automated trades. He thus discerns a logic of performance in speculative finance which parallels, without conflating, the performance of assets and the performance of traders in unleashing the quantum flows of trades (Ayache 2010, 48). Ayache describes the financial markets as the site of the 'absolute contingency' discussed by philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2008) as the structure of reality independent of human perception. In line with that, Takala throws into indistinction her role as an artist or as an employee in a way that estranges the social and ontological features of both. She likewise brings an 'absolute contingency' into a workplace that is supposedly already structured by the individualising and self-optimising precepts of 'human capital', figures that indicate that speculation has to stay within strict, routinised bounds and not exceed the logic of the situation. Further, like Ayache's trader who is a microcosm of the market and re-creates it with every trade, Takala dramatises the reproductive function for art of the sovereign artist: everything she does is art, a condition which *The Trainee* imagines extending to other kinds of socially necessary (and unnecessary) labour.

Here we might briefly cite Christopher Arthur's notion of 'counter-productive labour' as the limit to capital's complete internalisation of labour and metabolisation of it as value (Arthur 2004, 54). The 'recalcitrance' of workers to capital's efforts to compel their labour is an indispensable feature of the valorisation process, both pushing capital to innovate so as to destroy the barriers posed by this recalcitrance, and fostering the political subjectivity of workers, inasmuch as they experience their activity as distinct from its appropriation and valorisation by capital, as well as from their role as workers (Hardt and Negri 1994). The antagonism posed by this relation of labour to capital is internal to the production process, regardless of its form: labour is counter-productive insofar as it is subsumed by capital, it is not a matter of the technological content of the work, in contrast to the theories of 'immaterial labour'. Although the technological content may position the worker in such an intimate relation to the work that the negativity of labour may no longer be experienced as a collective force but rather an individual exhaustion and collapse (Berardi 2009). However, this antagonism can also be embodied in another social form which lies outside the valorisation process proper: art.

As we have already seen, the distinctiveness of the institution of art in capital is that it is not labour, and cannot be controlled or recognised in the same way as labour. But it is through this distance from labour that

art is turned into a repository of values deemed extrinsic to the valorisation process, including when that process comes to encompass more and more kinds of social relations. Art then both enacts the suspension of labour and mirrors it, insofar as labour in the era of financialisation, of speculation, operates precisely in the mode of suspension – deprived of class identity or productive necessity. But it does then remain to be elaborated, if this is the case, *why* art and labour are still two different domains. If art is an allegory for the counterproductive which has gained independence from the valorisation process and become its ‘own’ thing – the antithesis to that ‘which is the case’ – this runs a risk of turning art into a merely privative category: ‘if it is not anything else, let’s call it art’. This formality and ambiguity doubtlessly is what lends art, as a set of distinct practices, its allure for the proponents of a labour transformed in its working conditions and self-concept into an analogue for infinitely mutable and self-expanding – or deferred – value. Perhaps one way of approaching the questions at this conjunction of ‘emptying out’ and ‘putting to work’ is that advanced by the art theorist Thierry de Duve, who locates in art ‘after Duchamp’ not so much a kind of activity as a form of speculative judgement – ‘this is art’ – opening a way to think art out of its specialisation as non-labour and directly in relation to the kind of abstract value that lends a social character to all labours (De Duve 1998).

As *The Trainee* shows, the question of the sovereignty of the artist that has been established since Marcel Duchamp (as the guarantee that anything that an artist does as art is art) is put to the test in the workplace, where that sovereignty only stands a chance of being acknowledged in the abstract, that is, so long as the content of the work itself does not enter into its territory. The autonomy of art and the heteronomy of labour can only meet in the space of some undefined creativity, the ‘invisible labour’ managerial propagandists view as common to both, and this is exactly where Takala chooses to act.

Mimetic appropriations

Recent theoretical narratives have advanced a certain twisting of the terms of modernist autonomy and heteronomy as the parameters of art. Art’s tension with commodification has manifested as drives for the dissolution of art into non-art, or, conversely, art’s incorporation of social reality. Art has gravitated towards tropes of uselessness and negation when it comes to representing or emulating labour, and towards

representational and structural mimesis when it comes to representing or emulating the workings of finance (Gilligan 2008a). Yet, as we saw with Takala's *The Trainee*, the workings of finance come increasingly to set a template for wage-labour, privileging the intangible and relational over the tangible and consumable. Art can also react to this situation by trying to valorise directly artistic indeterminacy and art's 'antithesis to that which is the case' as a species of 'non-specialist specialism'. This can take the shape of consultancy to corporations who are ready to accept the uncertain but potentially ground-breaking assets which can be generated by the conjunction of speculative artistic and economic praxis (the historical example of the Artist Placement Group in the late 1960s and 1970s in Britain) or that intervene directly in the fabric of social reality as service providers (think of Denmark's Superflex or Austria's WochenKlausur) while retaining the margin of ambiguity (and income streams) of art, a position increasingly popular in times of state cutbacks in both social services and arts funding.

A speculative mode of production can also see art acting as a passive agent in the relation between art and speculative capital, enacting a simple mimesis of social capital's absent reflection on the specificity of art and labour's respective structural roles and the power relations that obtain on them. This is something we can witness, for instance in the work of British-German artist Tino Sehgal. Sehgal's large-scale orchestrations of social relations between hired 'participants' and gallery-goers do nothing so much as replicate the coerced performance of self common to similarly paid positions in less prestigious sectors of the service industry.³ Importantly, Sehgal obeys the conventions once vouchsafed as critical in 'de-materialised' conceptual art, even exceeding them with his insistence on no ephemera and no documentation of the performances. To say that his work is concerned with the 'experience economy' is to refrain from analysis, a move repeated in the work itself. This only throws into relief the affinity between his practice and 'general performance' (Lütticken 2012) as the rule for labour in the speculative mode of production. Other artists perform similar ironic mimeses of generally prevalent economic

3 These ideas came up in conversations conducted with former participants in *These Associations*, Sehgal's 24 July–28 October 2012 commission at Tate Modern. An enraptured *Guardian* journalist concluded his review of the piece by saying: '*These Associations* is one of the best Turbine Hall commissions. There are no objects: we are the subject. It is about communality and intimacy, the self as social being, the group and the individual, belonging and separation. We're in the middle of things. It is marvellous'. See Searle 2012.

conditions into the gallery space, such as Carey Young, Santiago Sierra or Theaster Gates, though the last's work functions in an extended sphere of social entrepreneurship of which art is only the most critically and financially lucrative site. Indeed, the topicality of economic realities in contemporary art could not be more ascendant, as the briefest scan of press releases and curatorial themes in 2013 would show.

Thus we can see, in this brief roster, that the persistent efficacy of art's autonomy as a field is the result of the social division of labour – more precisely, the division between mental and manual labour (Adorno 2007; Sohn-Rethel 1978). It may be that this division is deepened in the speculative mode of production, with its emphasis on *valorisation without labour*, an emphasis that refracts in proliferating forms of 'de-skilling' and 'meta'-gesturality within art. Art, as both a non-alienated form of labour and a sphere of inflated asset-values, has come to stand in for the opposite of this division, that is, free and un-alienated activity. However, not only does art stand for the overcoming of the divide between mental and manual labour, but also for the reconciliation of labour and capital as the paradigmatic form of 'human capital', the reflexive aspect of a speculative subjectivity whose rule is laid down by finance.

Provisional final remarks

This chapter has focused on tracing the structural affinities between art as a form of abstraction of social value and the abstract form of value at the heart of capital as they have played out both in contemporary art and in the shifting landscape of contemporary work. The main engine here has been designated as finance, as the extensive and intensive reach of financial industries and, more saliently, financial logics have re-configured the relations between art, capital and labour even as they have reshaped other institutions such as welfare or education into profit-yielding concerns. But, without going into the diverse and multi-valent literature on 'financialisation' or 'neoliberalism', we have restricted the field of analysis to tracking how the current forms in which we encounter labour and art start to mutate, as the difference between them blurs in an era when 'creativity' and 'performance' provide the metric by which both labour and art are assessed and produced. This is a financial logic which eliminates labour in favour of endlessly self-valorising value.

Art can either pursue inscription, flaunt complicity or observe various critical stances into this scenario. However, it may legitimately be asked – as it was by trends such as *OCTOBER*'s 'Recessional Aesthetics: An

Exchange' (2011, questionnaire out in 2009) shortly after the outbreak of the sub-prime mortgage crisis and the dramatic phase of the global economic meltdown that followed – whether the financial/social crisis that seems so interminably to define our era has not made some modification to the rules of the game as sketched out above. Observation would seem to suggest this has not been the case, either theoretically or empirically. Certainly, more economy-critical art gets made than before 2008, and economic histories and contradictions enter the thematic as well as the methodological resources of contemporary art from the critical and curatorial side on a notably larger scale than before. However, to the extent that the implosion of the neoliberal model has led only to the fanatical tightening of the screws of the same model, the fortunes of art have been affected and augmented in close connection or relative autonomy to the rest of a crisis-ridden social model, depending on whether it is publicly funded production or privately supported and speculative art markets at issue. A significant albeit predictable change is that the publicly funded sector has had to turn to the philanthropic purse – with high net-worth individuals often far more sympathetic to radical practices than the state – in the face of austerity cutbacks for culture in many nation states, a turn imposed as much by state policy as by necessity and one which did not commence with the crisis, only accelerated. The art market is still a safe haven and lucrative investment, continuing to launder billions of the proceeds of primitively accumulated or historically looted wealth. Inasmuch as the reproduction of capital becomes ever more divorced from social reproduction, on one side of the equation, or ever more linked to it through the agency of debt and ongoing speculative value circulation, on the other, art continues to play the role of the vanishing mediator and character mask of the self-optimising subject of capital ideologically – and if we take the concepts of 'real abstraction' or 'fetishism' seriously, ideology is nothing if not structural – and is materially sustained by capital's actual growth strategies (Fraser 2011, 114–27). The period of indefinite crisis has sharpened the contradictions for politicised art practice as for any activism or critical culture more broadly. Yet, so long as state policy and state power continue to support the accumulation strategies of speculative capital in this period with hardly any variance from what went on before and no concerted counter-attack currently emerging, it would be difficult to gauge a marked shift in speculation as a condition – a mode of production – for art and capital alike.

Women's Lives, Labour, Contracts, Documents: The Biopolitical Tactics of Feminist Art, Act Two and a Half

Angela Dimitrakaki

Art, 'absent and hidden': Absent from where, hidden from whom?

Art's transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century was announced in terms of a shift predicated on the advent of a new age: the age of biopolitics (Groys 2002). Boris Groys described an intensely bureaucratic paradigm whereby social control is exercised through a conspicuous deployment of administration and the spread and worship of documents. In this broader socio-economic paradigm, Groys argued, we also witness the shift from art to art documentation. Art documentation is what the public often now encounters in the conventional sites of art because art, Groys suggested, is 'absent and hidden' (108). Groys's essay appeared in a publication accompanying the entry of such 'absent and hidden' art into such a conventional site, namely an art exhibition. His essay was featured in the Documenta II catalogue, when this exhibition was among the first to suggest the emergence of curatorial narratives bent on providing an anatomy of global capital's impact on the world. The significance of Documenta as a periodic *salon* of contemporary art rose alongside an unprecedented autonomisation of the exhibition form from the museum and related traditional contexts (Dimitrakaki 2012). This autonomisation of the exhibition form, which has so far led to the exhibition form's globalisation (the Biennial reign being its screaming symptom), has been occurring, rather curiously, in parallel with a relocation of key strands of radical art making to *lived* socio-economic conditions – that is, to

spaces associated with 'reality' rather than 'representation'. These lived socio-economic conditions may or may not encompass those shaping the contemporary art world, which means that they are, in principle, understood as potentially overlapping with, but *not* reducible to, the art world as a 'special' sphere of production. And this provisional distance from the *protective* fabric of the art world is precisely what makes such art appear 'absent and hidden'. But, as we shall see, such art may well be engaged in testing the boundaries between the art institution (planning, protection) and the real world (unpredictability, risk). This 'planning' and 'protection' is often afforded through contracts whereas 'unpredictability' and 'risk' refer to conditions not captured by clauses. Yet it would be hard to contest that all four terms are today enmeshed in the logic and contradiction of capitalist markets, or else of the over-stretched field of the 'economy' and capital's control of production.

At the same time, the designation 'absent and hidden' invokes the Marxist feminist critique of so-called 'women's work': typically, a labour of care and love, of emotional nurture, of species and labour-power reproduction. Until recently mostly absent from platforms of political debate and hidden from mainstream Left discourses on labour, women's work continues to stand in a complicated relationship to the capitalist economy (Vishmidt 2012). The unprecedented interest in the breakthroughs of feminist theorists and activists associated with Italian Autonomist Marxism witnessed in the past few years suggests that contemporary capitalism's assault on labour is bringing about a new feminist consciousness where the biopolitical dimension of women's work-as-life and life-as-work can no longer be dismissed as marginal. In a 2012 issue of *The Commoner*, authors acknowledged that there is now an urgent need for a collective research project concerning 'how the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy' has affected 'reproductive work', that is 'the complex of activities and services that re-produce human beings as well as the commodity labor power, starting with child-care, housework, sex work and elder care' (Bardagallo and Federici 2012, 1). The provision of sex and intimacy, alongside all forms of care associated with the institution of marriage, are central to *The Commoner* authors, who assert that '*the sex worker is becoming the paradigm worker* in the global economy, in the same way as under-paid, precarious, "informal" female labour is becoming the paradigm for all forms of exploitation' (19; emphasis added).

The above developments, and the analytical tasks they introduce for a materialist feminist art history of the present, are my starting point

for approaching two of the most challenging works featured in the ECONOMY exhibition, Tanja Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* and Andrea Fraser's *Untitled*. That the works were 'featured' in the exhibition hardly meant that they were present. Rather, they are textbook cases of Groys's conception of art in the age of biopolitics as 'absent and hidden'. The curatorial decision (taken by Kirsten Lloyd and myself) to include them in the exhibition by means of art documentation, in the full knowledge of their purposeful absence and wilful invisibility, suggests the complex role of the document in mediating a politics of knowledge (and a politics of *dissemination* of social truth) as well as in enabling the extraction of value from an art that dissolves into life – a life that incorporates and is incorporated in capitalist market structures – like 'tears in the rain'. I borrow this memorable phrase from *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott's cult sci-fi film of 1982, which negotiated the thin line between real and non-real lives at the peak of a postmodern sensibility imbued by the anxiety that technology, and specifically technology that reproduces human beings, would end society as the outcome of human relations.

Over thirty years later, and with the reproduction of life as we know it much on the agenda of social movements worldwide, capitalism has added more causes for such an anxiety. The very discourse on the distinction between human and posthuman which characterised a great deal of literature on the postmodern has mutated into a discourse on the human/subhuman and global capital's ability to regulate access to a documented bios (human) and an undocumented 'bare life' (subhuman), to borrow from Giorgio Agamben's philosophical discourse (Agamben 1998 [1995]). And if the sex worker is becoming the 'paradigm worker of the global economy', she (for it is overwhelmingly a 'she') is also becoming the scapegoat of a moralising conservatism against women's sexual freedom and, more importantly, against women's making public their knowledge of their situation and uncovering the economic relations underwriting this situation. Such moralising conservatism goes hand in hand with the patriarchal protectionism of the fabric of society, perpetuating women's bondage and 'voluntary' self-sacrifice (read: unpaid work) at the global battleground of social reproduction (Laslett and Brenner 1989; Federici 2012a).

The two works I shall be focusing on in this chapter suggest intricate linkages between the labour that gives us artworks, art as a field of production (as discussed in the Introduction to this volume) and the broader production landscape of global capitalism in the early

twenty-first century. This circuit is nevertheless punctuated by the repeated affirmation of a gendered *life*, rather than just a gendered body, as the site of production. If in the late twentieth century the artist's body superseded the art object as the ground of art's commodification (despite many artists' intentions to defy commodification),¹ the biopolitical practice encountered in the art of today brings forth a more composite and expanded site of reification: the artist herself as a socio-economic subject in her interaction with fellow socio-economic subjects. This is an interaction that entails both material and ideological dimensions that lend 'gender' a leading role in the *normalisation of the diffusion* of economic relations into 'the personal'. Indeed, the biopolitical practices to be examined below reveal that if the passage from the personal to the political is possible, the crossing is through the minefield of economic relations. What is particularly interesting for a materialist feminist analysis is that both works, to which I will now turn, presuppose and require an emancipated female subject who does not just enter but *initiates* broadly contractual relationships with men. In both works the woman supplies or sells and the man takes or buys.

The marriage contract: a tale of European transnationalism and labour mobility

Ostojić initiated *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* in 2000, after a decade during which the former Eastern Europe was consistently humiliated as the continent's social abject and unwelcome 'poor' relative (Gržinić 2007) – a state of affairs formalised through the exclusion of its countries from international treaties permitting the free flow of people across internal European borders, such as the Schengen Treaty. Of course, it is imperative to grasp that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the European Union capitalist experiment effectively blurred the differentiation between the free flow of 'people' and the construction of a transnational labour force with severely eroded citizenship rights: the most glaring realisation of such an erosion is that labour mobility was not accompanied by voting rights. But, of course, a step further down the 'ladder of privilege' (Mohanty 2003) we find the obstacles to labour mobility in the first place. Thus, when Ostojić, once the citizen

1 The currency of the term in the last quarter of the twentieth century culminated in the encyclopaedic volume which took it as a title: *The Artist's Body* (Jones and Warr 2000; translated also into Spanish and Italian).

of a disappeared Yugoslavia, posted a personal ad online seeking to meet and marry a holder of a European Union passport, she effectively sought entry into this transnational flow of labour – a flow which nevertheless privileged the Western/Northern territories of Europe as the recipient of potentially productive labour and, as one might guess, ‘better’ and hence more visible art. We might as well add that when it comes to art at present, transnational labour rights are a necessary precondition for ‘success’ (for example, for networking and residencies) but also for the very basic access to ‘the materials’ (for example, for travelling to geographico-social destinations that will inspire or be directly addressed in artworks).

The role of artistic labour in strengthening this socio-economic dominance of the Western/Northern territories of Europe has largely gone unexamined in art historical negotiations of globalisation. And yet it is artistic labour’s established claim to, and undiminished emphasis on, autonomy which permits this labour’s special place – or indeed function – in a global regime of production privileging ‘creativity’. Taking into account that globalisation corresponded to a phenomenal increase in artistic labour mobility, which is what gave us the ‘itinerant artist’ (Kwon 2004), *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* asserts, in the first instance, the right of Eastern European artists to a globally dominant condition of labour and a transnational art-world economy.

However, the artist’s gender becomes here instrumental in fusing this art-world economy with the gendered informal economy of arranged marriages between Western men and non-Western women. Notably, Ostojić did not advertise for a *wealthy* holder of an EU passport. Nor did she specify the gender of the person she sought to marry. In implying that these two ‘clauses’ would have been superfluous, Ostojić succeeded at least in making apparent the economic basis of the ideologies regulating ‘personal life’: first, the condition of wealth is transferred from the individual male citizen to his country’s position in a continental geopolitics divided between assumed zones of affluence and zones of poverty; second, despite the EU’s pride in its liberal policies, marriage in the twenty-first century is exposed as an overwhelmingly heteronormative institution, the role of which is to transcribe, and mystify, economic relations as personal ones. In an awkward reversal of Marx’s famous saying on commodity fetishism (Marx 1990 [1867], 165), the relationship between the geographies of capital assumes the form of relations among people. But, to add a crucial parameter, these people are gendered.

Placed by hottanja@hotmail.com, Ostojić's ad included a visual centrepiece: a photographic portrait of herself, the (woman) artist where she turned the (debased) naked versus the (noble) nude division of progressive art historical scholarship on its head: having removed all hair from her body, Ostojić far from joins the hordes of beautified, unreal female nudes of art history, lending themselves to the symbolic rendition of prized cultural values. Rather, the photograph invokes the emaciated bodies of the Nazi camps and the sadistic paedophilic aesthetic of much contemporary pornography. Amazingly, neither puts off prospective suitors: Ostojić received about 500 responses, only a selection of which are included in the work's installation document. In the years that followed the initial ad placement, the artwork made full use of the durational principle characterising much participatory art, its temporality being fully integrated in the pace of the artist's life as regulated by the administrative machines that were to control that life's encounters with the lives of others.

Ostojić chose a German citizen and fellow artist as a prospective husband, 'Herr K', also known as Klemens G. She met him for the first time in the meadows surrounding Belgrade's Museum of Contemporary Art in the guise of a public performance. The first rendezvous between the prospective couple was documented on video, but this straightforward documentation was edited as part of a video piece where the realism of the documented encounter is constantly undone by the image-text narrative: English subtitles appear to record parts of a dialogue but also the private thoughts of the man and the woman, unclassifiable as either self-parody or 'straight' delusional speech. An unexpected image of intercourse, adhering to the visual codes of pornography (extreme close-up), inserted into a sequence registering what is supposed to be a romantic 'first date', serves to remind the art audience that what they are viewing is the 'art documentation' of the *sexual* core of the marriage contract, where marriage is openly an economic institution. Originally broadcast on the Internet, the first encounter scene could not have included this 'detail', added retrospectively to enhance the work's intention to negotiate a social truth rather than its commitment to traditional takes on realism (the truthful, if not objective, rendition of a social experience) as an artistic methodology.

Following their wedding, also in Belgrade, Ostojić moved to Düsseldorf as Herr K's wife on a temporary three-year visa, noting on her website, possibly with some irony: 'On January 9, 2002, we got officially married in Belgrade, and with [an] international marriage certificate I applied

for permission to live in [the] EU. This procedure takes about 8 weeks. Next step is to get EU passport, and I hope it won't take more than [*sic*] 10 years to get it.'² In spring 2005, the artist was offered a three-year visa instead of a permanent residence permit. The reason for this was that the couple's combined *income* was deemed too low by the immigration authorities: apparently, the authorities had not grasped at that point that 'artist' and 'precarity' were becoming synonymous – or, conversely, one might say that they grasped it only too well. And yet, despite this emphasis on the economic viability of a given marriage contract, the same authorities practised at the time the 'warm bed sheets' test, that is the examination of a couple's 'sleeping' (but implied sexual) arrangements. This was a clear case where economy and sex came together formally under the biopolitical rule exercised by contemporary state administration. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the artwork eventually concluded with the couple's divorce, celebrated with a 'Divorce Party' in July 2005.

In the five years the work required for its realisation, the artist engaged in parallel projects, all of them exploring formal and informal aspects of the EU migration economy – from the inflammatory and eventually censored *Untitled/After Courbet* (2004) presenting a photographic rendition of Courbet's renowned erotic painting, *The Origins of the World* (1866), of an exposed female torso positioned so as to confront the viewer with female genitals. In Ostojić's updated version, the viewer is protected from the naked truth: the genital area of the female torso (the artist's own) is dressed in panties bearing the European Union flag symbol, featuring a circle of stars corresponding to the 'original' honourable member states. In Ostojić's *Crossing Borders Series* (2000–04), the mechanisms controlling migration from East to West were tested through the artist's participation in endless visa application queues and other 'situations' of active deterrence. The discourse of how to keep the 'new' EU citizens 'out' during the Eurozone crisis has been formalised in governmental projects that exceed the ridiculous, lending Ostojić's art from a decade back a disturbing relevance.³

2 This is noted in the artist's website: www.van.at/see/tanja/not/mission.htm (accessed 12 December 2012).

3 For example, the vans driving around London in July 2013 bearing the poster: 'Go Home or Face Arrest' addressed to 'illegal' immigrants, as documented in the mainstream press. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24452551 (accessed 5 August 2013). In November 2014 British prime minister David Cameron proposed to stop citizens from new EU entrants working in the UK until their economies 'have converged more closely'. See <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-30224493> (accessed 5 December 2014).

The carrying out of these parallel projects did more than merely assert Ostojić's commitment to her artist identity, as the cumulative effect of the projects has been to identify Ostojić's oeuvre with the persistent exploration of the condition of migration, protecting the unusual experiment of *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* from being completely swallowed up by a moralising discourse over means and ends. Yet this danger cannot be wholly averted: indeed, such debates are inevitable when the artwork's document enters the exhibition site. *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* was criticised in the USA by audiences that dismissed it as manipulative and opportunistic, as recorded in a volume on Ostojić's work from 2000 to 2007 (Allara 2009).⁴ Having written elsewhere about the reasons why a feminist analysis of this work should prioritise a discourse on politics rather than ethics (Dimitrakaki 2011), I will limit myself here to a consideration of the work's implications for a materialist feminist analysis of art in relation to production.

The notion of politics I deploy here refers to the negotiation, in the public sphere, of relations of power. Although neither Michel Foucault's nor Giorgio Agamben's theoretical investment in biopolitics with the aim of understanding modern society prioritises the gendered dimension of power exercised on, and disseminated through, the social production of life, it is hard to see how it could be otherwise. If, as Šefik Tatlić observes, 'bare life is not one that would perceive itself as a victim: it has the tendency to see itself as potential bios, potential "success story"' (Tatlić 2009, 232), the dialectic between victimisation and success lies at the heart of Ostojić's work.

Importantly, Ostojić was not the first Eastern European artist to have gone down that road: Hungarian Judit Kele realised *I am a Work of Art* from 1979 to 1985. In Beata Hock's discussion of the work, we learn that when Kele auctioned herself to find out her 'worth', bidders were selected from among respondents to an ad in the French newspaper *Libération*. Kele did marry a gay male dancer, and although the marriage failed 'she never returned to live in Hungary' (Hock 2011, unpaginated). Even

4 See Allara 2009, 178. The comment describes the reception of the work by Brandeis students who 'were generally outraged by her [Ostojić's] actions', arguing that Ostojić had 'used' that 'nice Herr Golf', the German artist Ostojić married. The author had collaborated with Brandeis students for the exhibition 'Geobodies: A Question of Boundaries' (10 November 2005–24 January 2006), featuring work by Ursula Biemann and Ostojić. A review of the exhibition, where ethical concerns are highlighted through statements such as 'in the process, the institution of marriage is, in a way, abused', is indicative of the reactions Allara attempts to address. See Berger 2005.

more importantly, Hock notes that ‘many of the replies Kele received came from men who offered her their help out of what might be called “leftist comradeship”: they revealed the sender’s political affiliation as well as their awareness of how the project of communism went awry under state-socialism’ (Hock 2011, unpaginated). Hock notes that no such sentiment was expressed in the responses received by Ostojić in the early 2000s. Hock is right in pointing, implicitly at least, to the end of the Cold War as a major factor determining the meaning of each woman artist’s self-reification. In Ostojić’s timeframe, the migrant was no longer a ‘dissident’. Rather, she was overwhelmingly perceived as driven by an economic motive: specifically, as joining the right side of capitalism rather than fleeing a failed state-socialist experiment. Yet, in this case, the dialectic animating the artwork – what Tatlić refers to through his essay title as ‘the relationship between life and sovereign power’ – occurs neither in Ostojić’s life nor in her work but in the *negation of both as separate spheres* under the new conditions of production. Essentially, this negation is also a form of amalgamation – an acknowledged fusion of life and work into a new form of production as such.

Looking for a Husband with EU Passport can thus be construed as emblematic of the predominant role reserved for female subjects in a globally re-structured terrain of production. On the one hand, the continuous (ideological but for many acutely material) proximity of women to the private sphere – and the waged or unwaged work of reproduction, care and intimacy this entails – underlie the transnational trade of brides rather than grooms. What the brides trade is their care labour power (the ‘family making’ capacity), to be exchanged for financial security – and to the extent that this trade is a free, if financially determined, choice, the brides appear to use their femininity as their only available resource: they trade their ‘being a woman’ for something very close to what used to be a ‘family wage’. Ursula Biemman’s video essay *Writing Desire* (2001) identified specifically that women who entered the bride market traded a *deep* femininity: submissive and uncorrupted by the West’s feminist crusade (Dimitrakaki 2007). In the case of Ostojić’s marriage, the exchange broke down because financial security was not achieved: the family wage to be procured by the man in the marital union as well as the couple’s combined economic power proved to be myths of neoliberal fiction, a fiction that requires a disavowal of precarity as a key principle in capitalism’s current re-organisation of production.

But, on the other hand, the convention of art’s autonomy permitted Ostojić also to script the same process of exchange within the art

economy. It is indeed this work *outside the home*, the work Ostojić did as an artist, which mitigated the losses at the breakdown of the exchange and marriage contract: the circulation of 'art documentation' across exhibition sites, following the provisional completion of the 'hidden' artwork, can generate both symbolic capital and actual (if highly precarious) income, turning an 'exclusion' (from the integrated EU labour market) into an 'inclusion' (in the art-world economy). The lesson to be learned, of course, is that there is very little today that cannot be turned into productive labour, when the subject is willing and able to manage her 'self'.

In concluding the edited collection on Ostojić's projects on migration, Tatlić's approach acquires a heightened significance, especially when he asserts: 'This is what happens to bare life: the more it wants to become integrated into the work processes of neoliberal capitalism, the more it wants to become bios, life with style. It has a tendency not to resist the oppression but to become an oppressor' (Tatlić 2009, 233). Besides seeing capital assume the form of a social relation (in the sense that capital becomes the arbiter of both positions: inclusion and exclusion), Tatlić's line of argument tackles the very structure of desire in capitalism as an internalisation of the principle of *exercising* power, the 'becoming an oppressor'. To the extent that a successful integration into the classes for which 'capitalism works' (pun intended) requires participation into a global system of labour exploitation: becoming an oppressor is indeed inevitable. Yet an oppressor is revealed to be that by the oppressed, and such revealing presupposes that the oppressed have some kind of *access* to the oppressor. Distance is a serious impediment to access, to recognising who your oppressor is and to struggling against him. (Arguably, one benefit to come to capital from the system of outsourced labour to the Global South was the provision of the necessary distance: such distance would allow privileged geographies to consume unperturbed by the sight of hyper-exploited zones of cheap-labour misery.) The autonomy of art rather enables Ostojić to move beyond the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy and show what happens when one is both. Art becomes thus a framework where the artist can gain control over her self-exploitation, that is, put into circulation her own life by means of 'art documentation'. Yet this appears to be the generic condition of the sexualised migrant subjectivity when engaging in tactical manoeuvres against the hegemonic form of power relations: denied the possibility to exercise power over others, one is permitted, and even encouraged, to streamline and manage one's life into a production enterprise – that is, to exercise capital's power onto oneself and hope for 'integration'.

**The art sale agreement:
sex work in the first-world art world**

The inclusion of Andrea Fraser's *Untitled* (2003) in the ECONOMY exhibition was intended to highlight further how a logic of gendering underpins the transformation of artistic labour in the era identified as post-Fordism: one that has (allegedly) overcome the serial model of production identified with the factory and that instituted the hegemony of immaterial labour, a concept that divides critics of neo-capitalism (Chukhrov 2011). *Untitled* was also a durational artwork, its effects unfolding beyond its attached date of 2003, at least according to the artist who asserted, in hindsight: 'who I talk to about *Untitled* and how I talk about it is also part of the piece. Not talking to Fox News is part of the piece, and not going on MSNBC is part of the piece, and not doing an interview with, you know, Nerve.com is part of the piece' (Praxis 2004, unpaginated).

Untitled was realised as a social and economic relationship that involved two primary participants and a facilitator. The two participants were a female artist (Andrea Fraser) and an unmarried male collector who agreed in advance to purchase a videotape documenting his sexual encounter with the artist – one of what would be an edition of five. The artist's dealer, the facilitator, helped the artist find the collector who would agree to collaborate on the work's production. It becomes evident that a work where sex enters the production cycle is already framed by assumptions that correspond to normalised ideological positions: here, a liberated heteronormative female sexuality which permitted the work to operate on the premise that women can initiate one-night stands and art sales. The confrontation with accepted morals in the media (Saltz 2013) existed because the distance between the sexual encounter and the art sale was brought to the fore – indeed, here an economic transaction explicitly profaned the high moral ground reserved for art as the highest expression of 'civilisation', where somehow economic relations need to be 'forgotten', or at least be seen to reside in the debased 'context' (the culture industry, the art market and so on) for the 'real' artwork's 'true/aesthetic' value to emerge (De Duve 2007).

The first of the five videos made was bought by the participating collector for an undisclosed amount. There was no contract as such but the collector received a receipt, from the dealer's gallery, upon the sale. The transaction was based on what would have been called 'a gentlemen's agreement' to be honoured upon delivery of the product (a document),

except that the gentleman's right to trade was now extended to a woman. Yet the videotape was not the only art document. The art documentation used in *ECONOMY* took the form of a series of stills narrating the encounter, a photograph showing the typical installation of the videotape and a framed press release describing the work and contextualising it in the oeuvre of the artist. The press release stated that 'the work raises issues regarding the ethical and consensual terms of interpersonal relationships as well as the contractual terms of economic exchange'. Alluded to in the phrase 'contractual terms', the contract is indeed the artwork's and the art documentation's haunting Althusserian 'lonely hour of the last instance', as discussed in this volume's Introduction. And, significantly, in engendering a variety of documents, Fraser enhanced the impression of *partial* representation that the document as such is able to perform when called to stand for the elusive (absent and hidden) 'real' artwork, suggesting that *Untitled* encompassed a range of relations associated with the expectation of producing an art document – which, unlike the artwork, could be bought and/or be put on display. As indeed was the case.

In the installation presented in *ECONOMY*, the shared immobility of the press release and the photographic documentation worked in favour of the textual information provided, making it an inescapable point of reference. Also, the same quiet immobility aided the uncomplicated 'blending' of *Untitled* and, crucially, of the labour that underpinned it, with the variety of art work 'methods', i.e., forms of labour, represented in the show as a conscious curatorial choice. One of the issues that preoccupied us, as curators, was precisely the assumed *equivalence* of forms of artistic labour that especially the group exhibition context requires in order to enable the aesthetic appreciation of items on display. One could easily get curious about how far this equivalence of labour could stretch: what kind of labour could ultimately enter 'art' and the art institution?

Contemporary art has certainly expanded the forms of labour that find their way into artworks and feed the provision of documents, which is precisely why the above question arose. Documents (a video and photographs) of works such as Santiago Sierra's *The Penetrated* (2008), where a number of couples execute intercourse as per the male artist's instructions, alternating in 'soulless' encounters (in an inspired allusion to Spain's and possibly Europe's colonial past but, inevitably given the year it was made, metaphorised as the onset of acutely contemporary, global economic woes), seem to suggest that the art institution can now

accommodate just about *any* working method.⁵ And yet Sierra's detached management of sexual labour finds itself closer to Yves Klein's cool direction of nude 'female models' (i.e., naked women) as paintbrushes in his *Anthropometries* (1960) than Fraser's embodiment of the labouring body. Somehow the incorporation of sexual labour in contemporary art appears to require a body already *othered*: it can be female, or homosexual, or migrant or simply a body submissive and passive enough to sell its labour cheaply.⁶ In short, art in the age of global capital trades in a *feminised* labouring body: a clear and denigrating deviation from the golden standard set by the unionised, white, male worker of the industrial West, once seen as the hope for, and core of, revolutionary action leading to human emancipation. This was the subject on the side of whom Walter Benjamin's 'Author as Producer', from 1936, was supposed to fight in industrial modernity. Fraser, the author of an essay entitled 'How to Provide an Artistic Service', which appeared in German in 1994 and in English a few years later, was apparently long preoccupied with a different kind of producer.⁷ The feminised labouring body has been identified with the rise of a service economy but also with the complete marketisation of human relations. Fraser's emphasis on 'the contractual terms of economic exchange' essentially asserted that transactions in the art market are not that far apart from transactions in other markets. That the wealthy, male, white collector is also drawn into a transaction involving *his* sexual labour appears to complicate the class politics of alienation on which *Untitled* is centred. Yet *Untitled* affirmed

5 *The Penetrated* (45 mins) was filmed on 12 October – Día de la Raza (Day of the Race) – in Spain, the national holiday commemorating Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas. Notably, the work involved penetrative sex in both heterosexual and homosexual 'arrangements', as well as between white–white and black–white 'pairings'. Yet, as wittily put in the American press: 'I would submit, gentle reader, that anyone watching these couples (who were all hired for the occasion, their faces digitally blurred) dutifully screwing each other in the ass would be hard pressed to discern "an analysis of contemporary social structures in Spain." And never mind that when the Spanish invaded the Americas they didn't encounter black people'. See Micchelli 2010, unpaginated.

6 I am thinking here of Sierra's 2000 piece where he, an artist of imperialist Spain, paid 20 Mexicans to masturbate and be videotaped. See Drummond 2010. See also Kirsten Lloyd's analysis, in this volume, of Dani Marti's work generating intimacy, sex and care in the lives of gay men (the artist included), and the moral issues this biopolitical practice raises (or not).

7 The essay accompanied *Services*, an influential collaborative project/exhibition of Fraser and Helmut Draxler on tour in Europe and the USA from 1994 to 2001.

that marketisation at present leaves no privileged subject standing (either the 'successful' artist or the collector), offering instead a picture of an art world that manages to compromise even those once thought to be spared from alienation. Indeed, the art world is hereby delivered to the public as a democracy of alienation. And the question that remains to be asked is who this presentation is addressed to, and to what effect.

Through her many projects associated with institutional critique, Fraser has repeatedly explored the shift of artistic labour towards the provision of services for the art-loving public. Fraser is the focus of Michael Léger's opening chapter in his exploration of a contemporary avant-garde, where he argues that her work 'has complicated the mode of institutional critique by amplifying the dimension of subjectivity' and by 'extending institutional critique to feminist grounds' (Léger 2012, 14). Léger discusses two early projects of Fraser: *Museum Highlights*, from 1989, in a section of his essay entitled 'What does autonomy want?' and *Services*, Fraser's 1994 collaboration with Helmut Draxler discussed in the section 'The field of immaterial labour'. But, much like in an earlier essay (Léger 2008–09), where Léger situates *Untitled* in relation to 'neo-feminism' and the possibility of a contemporary avant-garde, his discussion does not in fact pursue a link between, precisely, immaterial labour and gendered artistic labour. In an online essay on Fraser's work, Léger concludes by contending that 'in this instance, the personal should also be subject to a critique of its metapolitical operations in the form of class struggle'. Although, in this essay, Léger distances himself from Brian Holmes's repudiation of Fraser's practice as leading to 'a governmentality of failure, where the subject can do no more than contemplate his or her own psychic prison, with a few aesthetic luxuries in compensation' (Holmes 2007, quoted in Léger 2010, unpaginated), he remains at least sceptical as regards the political efficacy of *Untitled*. Perceiving *Untitled* as an effort at rehabilitating 'the personal is political' for the post-2000 neoliberal art world, Léger implies that how such works function politically must be also assessed in relation to class struggle as something *necessarily other* than identity politics, in the context of which (one is led to assume) we must position feminism. Indeed, he states: 'What makes works like *Untitled* pertinent to the question of the relation of neo-feminism to neo-avant-garde, then, is its claim to critical autonomy and its distance from *economic* principles of hierarchization' (Léger 2010, unpaginated; emphasis added). Obviously, including the art-document form of *Untitled* in an exhibition titled ECONOMY suggests that, as curators, we held the opposite view: we diagnosed a

scathing parody of the autonomy principle, still upheld by the Left and Right in relation to art, if for very different reasons, and a caustic embodiment of a neo-capitalist economic logic.

Speaking about embodiment, *Untitled* took some bold steps towards departing from an investment in the artist's body and extending the critique of gender relations into a field of governance that targets the artist's life. This is precisely what is at stake in Fraser's statement that choices made *after* the assumed completion of the work form part of the work. Indeed, *Untitled* can be seen as an exercise in the difficulty to contain the artwork as a measurable (and dated) output and to demarcate the artwork's differentiation from the outcome of artistic practice as the terrain of more general and unpredictable effects – the implications of this distinction are discussed in the Introduction to this volume. In this case, the 'framing' of the artwork as precisely an artwork does not rest solely on the provision of a document after the act but also on the function of rumour surrounding the sale, the 'how much' question accompanying the transaction centred on the videotaped encounter (an encounter that, incidentally, encompassed moments of intimacy and muted chatting over drinks as much as sex). I say 'the rumour' as the sum paid by the collector for acquiring the tape, as stipulated in the artwork's guidelines for production, is not in fact known, despite speculations in scholarly and journalistic writing. As I have argued elsewhere (Dimitrakaki 2011), the reason for this may well have been the anticipated moralising discourse that grew around the artwork, centring on metaphors of prostitution: declaring the price might have strengthened such analogies between artistic labour and the labour of prostituted subjects. Yet a salient point of *Untitled* has been the *decoupling* of sexual labour and prostitution, following the persistent attempts of Fraser (since at least a decade before making the work) to distinguish artistic labour from other forms of labour: the attempt to see the artist as a service provider inscribes artistic labour as a separate kind of labour, yet one positioned in an inflated and ubiquitous service economy.

Seen in this light, *Untitled* merely removed (more or less literally) the fig leaf from the body of art, that is the pretence of art's distinction from a general regime of production: an artist might well provide a distinguishable product called 'artwork' but ultimately the 'artwork' followed the general market trend c.2000 whereby services counted as products. There was certainly a risk in this gesture: the risk of glamorising sexual labour precisely as non-prostitution but rather as a

legitimate element of the respectable, intellectual and critical field that radical art is for many. Whether art at present continues to define a space of positively invested difference (or non-identity with life where sexual labour is overwhelmingly associated with prostitution) is, however, the question that *Untitled* brings to the fore, tasking the history of contemporary art, as a history also of the economic relations that define art at present, with identifying the parameters underpinning a possible answer. The critique therefore hypostatized in *Untitled* is directed at the concept of the avant-garde and its historical impertinence when art is fully subsumed under the capitalist market logic. It is an unwelcome critique – again for both the Left and the Right, if also for different reasons. An issue of particular interest to a materialist feminist critique of contemporary art is that the gendered division of labour is used here to describe the foundational condition of contemporary art production (the one between sellers and buyers) as also ‘absent and hidden’. That the sale contract is initiated by a woman, who nevertheless sells a work incorporating her own sexual labour, is a step further to the anthropological finding that women are exchanged between men (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]). Clearly, women, in the first world no longer need to be exchanged by men, having secured the right to sell their own labour power outside the home. *Untitled* therefore articulates a telling critique of women’s assumed emancipation, calling for a rethinking of what is legitimised as its content and in what historical conditions, and so, ultimately, the subject addressed in *Untitled* is the liberal feminist. This critique emerged strongly in the struggles of Marxist feminists of the second wave who demanded women’s autonomy ‘not just from men but from capital’ (Federici 2012a, 11) and its institutions. The critique was, however, forgotten in the years where women were persuaded to master their self-exploitation in exchange for wages. As the imagined product of non-alienated, i.e., artistic, labour, *Untitled* extends this critique, which now reveals not just wages but even the ‘free’ sale of female sexuality to serve and augment a profit-oriented economy where the producer can now include herself as a key component of the ‘product’. If Silvia Federici argued in ‘Why Sexuality Is Work’ (Federici 2012 [1975]) that ‘fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps all have acted as agents of the state, to supervise our [women’s] sexual work, to ensure that we would provide sexual services according to the established, socially sanctioned sexual norms’, *Untitled* points to contemporary art as a production site that can do away with the above male agents, achieving equality in not-quite-the-best of possible worlds.

Feminist art, act two and a half: identity politics in labour politics

Both from the early 2000s but from territories locked in a Cold War mentality until the end of the 1980s (Eastern Europe and the USA), *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* and *Untitled* constitute evidence that insofar as feminist art is concerned, the ‘difference’ between first- and second-world art scenes is rapidly diminishing.⁸ Much like recent biopolitical art’s actualisation of ‘art as life’, which turned the historical avant-garde’s utopian drive into a verification of atomised and collective dystopias, the diminishing of this gap does not appear to generate more equality and democracy but rather to distribute more alienation and subjugation. The prominence of a legally binding agreement in Ostojić’s work brings forth the role of Law and therefore ‘the state as the representative of collective capital’ (Federici 2012a, 9), now mediating women’s self-exploitation. The ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ prominent in Fraser’s work exposes, however, the deeper, ideological attachment to the values underpinning entry to capitalist labour markets. In both cases we find a powerful critique of ‘liberated’ women’s collusion with the patriarchal-capitalist nexus regulating ‘the personal’ as well as ‘the professional’.

What both these artworks achieve is a proposition the implications of which call for further scrutiny: that at least some women are no longer happy in their self-sacrifice, and, if they are to carry on embodying capitalist sexual relations, they might as well take these relations from the hidden place of home or hotel room to the hyper-visible, mobile and socially rewarded site of the art document. Introduced in an artwork and its record, such formerly hidden labour can accrue value and generate income as well as enhance prestige and social status – in sharp contrast to the utterly devalued (as elementary, uncreative, unskilled) and unpaid for (as natural and self-gratifying) labour of love, intimacy and affection performed in a variety of ‘private’ spaces. But women’s rejection of self-sacrifice and their refusal to keep their sexual labour in the hidden confines of private places and times, at least when the transgression takes place through an artwork, entails a pull towards a risky self-humiliation with unpredictable effects. And this is something that the art document

8 The division between a ‘hegemonic’ feminism of the West and a ‘derivative’ feminism of Eastern Europe has been extensively discussed in feminist art literature. Indicatively, see Pejić 2009.

takes care of. In many ways, the art document of such practices assures both artist and gallery visitor that the tale told had a happy ending and that no one got hurt in the process. Art documentation then does not just discipline this 'absent and hidden' art by dragging it back to display sites where detached contemplation or ethico-emotional hyperventilation typically thrive; it also subdues the effects of any political risk taken by the artist, suggesting that ultimately all was carefully managed art rather than uncontrollable life.

Despite this, however, the rise of biopolitical production in women artists' work must be seen historically, as it denotes an important shift in the gendered labour of art. Executed before the disastrous financial crisis that gripped the public imagination in 2008, *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* and *Untitled* signal women artists' turn from what political theorist Nancy Fraser called a 'politics of recognition' (Fraser 2013), identified with a postmodern sensibility and its politics of representation, to a politics of refusal. True, a politics of refusal is not quite the 'politics of redistribution' that Nancy Fraser, and many others (myself included), would like to welcome as the most revolutionary phase of modern-day feminism, what Fraser names 'Act Three' of feminist politics.⁹ But it will have to do: moving from artworks that represent the identity of 'Eastern European' or 'American' woman, Fraser and Ostojić opt to perform the centrality of gender-divided labour in subjectivities of economic otherness that are globally valid. In other words, they rupture the binary *between identity politics and labour politics*, proposing an integrated understanding of their position as 'women artists', a radicalised professional group throughout the history of contemporary art. We can call this Feminist Art, Act Two and a Half, following, as it does, upon the feminist art that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s out of second-wave struggles and the combined post-feminism and DIY feminism of the 1990s. Feminist Art, Act Two and a Half offers ways of speaking about the *feminisation of the productive subject* in the 'life means work' mentality of post-Fordism. The two artworks discussed here serve to introduce into public discourse a contemporary feminist project whereby the 'woman artist' refuses her secondary position in auction

9 To be accurate, Nancy Fraser imagines a 'feminism of Act Three' in the twenty-first century where feminists would be 'struggling simultaneously on all three fronts – call them redistribution, recognition, and representation' and a joining 'with other anti-capitalist forces, even while exposing their continued failure to absorb the insights of decades of feminist activism' (Fraser 2013, 5).

rooms; 'women artists' are indeed in a process of dis-identifying from a victimised group subjectivity to be rescued (from art-historical oblivion and lack of access to symbolic capital) by a (mostly) liberal feminist art history. Rather, Ostojić and Fraser, as women artists, make manifest the political economy of the combination 'being a woman and being an artist' which defines both their means of subsistence and reproduction: being a woman is a resource that, at present, the artistic profession can invest with value through the commodity-form. The political value of making women aware, and critical, of this principle of production must not be lost to twenty-first-century anti-capitalist feminism across its many sites of struggle, of which the art world is but one.

Seeing Socialism: On the Aesthetics of the Economy, Production and the Plan

Alberto Toscano

In the context of a widespread preoccupation with the aesthetics of politics and the politicisation of art, less attention has been accorded to that area of practical and theoretical effort which we could temporarily class under the rubric of the *aesthetics of the economy* (I say temporarily, since a rigorous exploration of such an aesthetics soon enough challenges the separation between politics and economics). The latter comes to the fore with special urgency in moments of crisis, when our cognitive and political deficit, faced with a complex unravelling and degradation of a system whose intelligibility was always partial, can be registered at the aesthetic level – very broadly construed to include both artificially constructed representations and the individual and collective organs of perception. I want to argue in these pages that it is around the articulation between crisis and transparency that we can best gauge the contribution of the artistic and theoretical ferment of the 1920s and 1930s to thinking the entanglement of two facets of the aesthetics of the economy, conceived not as a domain but as a problem: that of the representability of capital and that of the intelligibility of transition (to communism).

The aesthetics of the economy

As an initial methodological proviso it is worth noting that representations *of* the economy and *in* the economy cannot be compartmentalised without losing the complexity of the question of representation itself.

Susan Buck-Morss's essay 'Envisioning Capital' (1995) provides some important orientation in this regard. Importantly, Buck-Morss presents the 'making' or 'fixing' of the economy as a fundamentally representational problem, to the very degree that it involves establishing agency and efficacy for an abstraction – 'picturing' economic relations and transactions as a unity, a totality, or even, with Marx, as an 'automatic subject'. Among other protocols, this mapping activity involves projecting an external point from which to grasp and navigate a situation within which one is multiply embedded (mapping is thus a kind of transcendence laboriously extorted from immanence, and this *scientia dei*, this God's eye view, is a condition of orientation).

The construction and stabilisation of diagrams and images of the economy signal a kind of epistemic and political shift with significant repercussions on the very idea of representation. The economic representations that, in intimate conjunction with theoretical developments in political economy, allow one to envision capital can, for instance, short-circuit or circumvent the problems of a linear, sequential discourse. We can register this in François Quesnay's reflections on his *tableau économique*: 'the zigzag, if properly understood, cuts out a whole number of details, and brings before your eyes certain closely interwoven ideas which the intellect alone would have a great deal of difficulty in grasping, unravelling and reconciling by the method of discourse' (Quesnay, in McNally 1988, 110; Buck-Morss 1995, 440).¹

The tableau thus allows for a kind of synchronic totalisation of temporal and material movements, which a sequential account of production would be incapable of figuring. In light of Quesnay's training as a physician, we could also think of the disciplinary sources of these representations: for instance, in the passage from blood circulation to the circulation of humans in cities, and further to the circulation of money and resources (Foucault 2007, 17–18). The diagrams are not only diagrams of circulation but also of origination (for the Physiocrats, in the 'fertile' relation between landowners and farmers). It is crucial then also to think of the metaphorical reservoirs from which these representations draw, for instance, the relationship to mechanical and organic models of the economy, with their varying presuppositions about its integrity, composition, operation, degradation; and also to link these economic representations to their political pendants, thinking of the passage,

1 See also Marx's revision of Quesnay's *tableau* in his letter to Engels of 6 July 1863. See Marx and Engels 1965 (no longer available at www.marxists.org/archive/marx).

for instance, from the visibility of Quesnay's table, overseen by legal despotism, to the charting of the effects of the division of labour over time in William Playfair's *Commercial and Politics Atlas* of 1786.

Timothy Mitchell similarly explores the efficacy and influence of 'mechanical analogies for the functioning of economic processes':

At the same time, professional economists continued to imagine mechanical analogies for the functioning of economic processes. Irving Fisher's 1892 doctoral dissertation, which Paul Samuelson called 'the best of all doctoral dissertations in economics', developed a mechanical model of an economic market consisting of a network of cisterns, levers, pipes, rods, sliding pivots and stoppers, through which the flow of water represented the working of the principle of utility. In 1892 he built a working model of this contraption which he used in his classes at Yale for years, until it wore out, and in 1925 he replaced it with an improved model. Fisher argued that the model provided not just a picture of the market but an instrument of investigation, and that the effect of complex variations in the market could be studied by altering the positions of the various stoppers, levers and pivots. (Mitchell 1998, 86)

These activities of modelling, diagramming and envisioning are thus representational in what is perhaps a counter-intuitive sense, since they break with a model of representation as mirror, photograph, correlation. As representations of practically abstract processes and relations, they are also representations of invisibilities.

What is it that we see in fact, when we 'see' the economy? In Buck-Morss's account of Adam Smith's vision, only the results ('invisible except in its commodity effects'), from which, by induction, we project a process (the division of labour, the real protagonist in Smith, whose distributional effects are spoken of in the providentialist, theological image of the invisible hand): 'We see only the material evidence of the fertile process of the division of labor: the astounding multiplication of objects produced for sale. Commodities pile up' (Buck-Morss 1995, 447). Parenthetically, we can recall here a famous dramatic flourish from *Capital*:

Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold

there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business.' Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making. (Marx 2011, 195)

Much of the modernist corrective to the aesthetics inhering in the Marxist representation of capital – be it in Bertolt Brecht's critique of photographic realism or Louis Althusser's speculations on the realism of the abstract (Brecht 2004 [1931]; Althusser 1971a [1966]) – will of course strive increasingly to separate representation from sight. For, as Marx's own work makes plain, when we walk into the factory we do not see capital 'itself' any more than we see it in the market.

As Buck-Morss details, these novel representations of a causally determinant but invisible system are also formative of modes of subjectivity and patterns of desire. This, for instance, is how she correlates abstraction, representation and agency in the classical political economy of Smith:

Looking up from my work at this landscape of things, I cannot see the whole of its terrain. It extends beyond my ability to feel. And this blindness leaves me free to drop my sight to the short horizon of my own self-interest. Indeed, blindness is the state of proper action. Within that horizon, however, desire is free and knows no bounds. This desire expresses itself as a pursuit for things. The pleasure of mutual sympathy, when I find my companion entering into my situation as I into his, is replaced by the pleasure of empathy with the commodity, when I find myself adapting my behavior to its own – which is to say, I mimic its expansiveness. (Buck-Morss 1995, 452)

The shift between different regimes of economic practice can also be traced in terms of forms of envisioning, which is also to say of forms of abstracting – in the sense of selecting, extracting and shaping material for cognition and action. Indeed, Buck-Morss traces an increasing formalisation and stylisation in the movement from classical political economy to neoclassical economics, which is both inscribed in and impelled by a different representational regime. We can then in a sense 'read off' the politics of neoclassical economics from its relation to visual display:

Neoclassical economics is microeconomics. Minimalism is characteristic of its visual display. In the crossing of the supply-demand curve, none of the substantive problems of political economy are resolved, while the social whole simply disappears from sight. Once this happens, critical reflection on the exogenous conditions of a

'given' market situation becomes impossible, and the philosophy of political economy becomes so theoretically impoverished that it can be said to come to an end. (Buck-Morss 1995, 463)

Among the productive insights in Buck-Morss's inquiry is its focus on money as the locus of representation. As she notes: 'Money is the measurement of economic activity, the universal representation of all commodities' (Buck-Morss 1995, 455). But money is both an index and a means of representation. One may even see its hegemony as leading, especially with its detachment from a standard or base (in gold, for instance), to a general 'ungrounding' of representation, from floating currencies to floating signifiers – a theme evident in the concern with credit-money in Jean-Francois Lyotard as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Lyotard 1993, 201–40; Deleuze and Guattari 1983 [1972], 222–40). Alongside the greater abstraction and volatility of money, we can follow Buck-Morss in noting how the formalisation and mathematisation of the graph – supreme tool and emblem of neoclassical economics – entails that representation no longer needs to *refer*, in the sense of being physically mappable onto the outside world. As she puts it, the graph is 'not a picture of the social body as a whole, but statistical correlations that show patterns as a sign of nature's plan' (Buck-Morss 1995, 456).

Now, where Buck-Morss is perhaps less productive is in her contention that Marx's contribution is in making visible the embodied suffering generated by capital's voracious abstractions. *Das Kapital's* 'critical eloquence', she writes,

is derived from the fact that we are plunged beneath the surface of commodity exchange to the actual level of human suffering – here thousands of factory workers – that was the lived truth of really existing capitalism during the era of its industrialization. Marx insisted that the human effects of the economy be made visible and palpable, and this remains his contribution to political economy no matter how often his theories – of crisis, of value, of increasing misery – may be disproved. (Buck-Morss 1995, 460 n. 66)

I think this formulation could almost be reversed. Marx's visualisations of mortified labour are expressly drawn from factory inspections and their reformist, pragmatic aims; there were more detailed, incisive and poignant accounts of the misery wreaked by capitalism – not least Engels' own *Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1958). Yet,

though without doubt conditions comparable to, or worse than, those depicted in the mid-nineteenth century by Marx are still constitutive of contemporary accumulation, it is not the historically and geographically specific descriptions of human suffering, but the *dialectical exposition* of its founding dynamics that renders Marx's approach unique. To misappropriate the title of an important book by Donald Mackenzie (Mackenzie 2006), what is evoked in this representation of capitalism is an 'engine, not a camera'. If Marx is still relevant then to the question of capitalism and its representation, it is then to the extent that his theories – of crisis, of value, of increasing misery – remain analytically and critically incisive even when his (borrowed and dramatised) descriptions of the cruelly concrete effects of abstract domination are inevitably stamped with anachronism.

Crisis and transparency

In 1920 Georg Lukács posed the problem of class consciousness, in his eponymous essay later collected in *History and Class Consciousness*, precisely in terms of the aesthetics of capitalist crisis – that is to say, in terms of the political and epistemological conditions for seeing an essential, if contradictory, unity behind the disjoined appearances of capitalism. The invisibility of capitalism *as such* is something of an axiom. As Lukács wrote: 'It is true that society as such is highly unified and that it evolves in a unified manner. But in a world where the reified relations of capitalism have the appearance of a natural environment it looks as if there is not a unity but a diversity of mutually independent objects and forces' (Lukács 1972, 70). Whence the 'empiricism' of bourgeois consciousness. The unity of capitalism is thus an *opaque* unity, recalling Marx's contrast between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, his only use of the vexed notion of transparency, to which I shall return. The formulation is from *Capital*, vol. 1: 'Those ancient social organisms of production are, as compared with bourgeois society, extremely simple and transparent'.

Now, one of Marx's key insights, according to Lukács, was that 'one of the elementary rules of class warfare was to advance beyond what was immediately given [...] to look beyond the divisive symptoms of the economic process to the unity of the total social system underlying it' or, to put it in Marx's own words, the workers 'ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects' (Marx, in Lukács 1972, 72–73) – when, for instance, they are occupied

on the trade-union front. It is in this regard that the impasses of class consciousness and revolutionary action are *aesthetic* problems, specific to capital's regime of (in)visibility, regarding which crisis provides potential opportunities. As Lukács observes:

In the age of capitalism it is not possible for the total system to become directly visible in external phenomena. For instance, the economic basis of a world crisis is undoubtedly unified and its coherence can be understood. But its actual appearance in time and space will take the form of a disparate succession of events in different countries at different times and even in different branches of industry in a number of countries. (Lukács 1972, 72–73)

But 'in so-called periods of normality [...] the gap between appearance and ultimate reality was too great for that unity [in the economic process] to have any practical consequences for proletarian action. In periods of crisis the position is quite different. The unity of the economic process now moves within reach' (Lukács 1972, 74–75). At this level, crisis is a rupture, but paradoxically it is a *synthetic rupture*, potentially making visible the unity between seemingly disparate domains and determinations.

This articulation between class consciousness and crisis – on which we can project the dyads of transparency/opacity, visibility/invisibility and unity/multiplicity – is worth keeping in mind when we reflect on the crucial role played in critiques and deconstructions of Marxism and communism precisely by the problem of its 'aesthetics of the economy', as well as its 'aesthetics of politics'. Present in Cold-War critiques of communism as a millenarian political theology heralding the advent of a society devoid of conflict and difference, and in neoliberal refutations of centralised planning as a disastrous fantasy founded on the premise of a complete intelligibility of economic information, this aesthetic counter to the critique of political economy and its striving towards a society of associated producers is also at the heart of post-Marxism. In a 1987 intervention around psychoanalysis and Marxism, Ernesto Laclau proposed that there existed a tension within Marxism, mappable in terms of its interiority or exteriority to the Enlightenment project. On the one hand, Marxism breaks with the Enlightenment in 'the affirmation of the central character of negativity – struggle and antagonism – in the structure of any collective identity', and, most significantly for our purposes, in 'the affirmation of the opaqueness of the social – the ideological nature of collective representations – which establishes a

permanent gap between the real and the manifest senses of individual and social group actions'. On the other hand:

Marxism is not only a discourse of negativity and the opaqueness of the social, it is also an attempt – perfectly compatible with the Enlightenment – to limit and master them. The negativity and opaqueness of the social only exist in 'human prehistory', which will be definitely surpassed by communism conceived as homogeneous and transparent society. It is from this mastery of totality that the moment of negativity loses its constitutive and foundational character: it shone for just a brief moment in theoretical discourse, only to dissolve an instant later into the full positivity which reabsorbed it – positivity of history and society as totalizations of their partial processes, the positivity of the subject – the social classes as agents of history. It would be absurd to deny that this dimension of mastery/transparency/rationalism is present in Marxism. (Laclau 1987, 331–32)

I agree that this would be absurd, but it would also be absurd to ignore the concrete historical and polemical context in which this 'aesthetic' dimension of Marxist knowledge and praxis is played out: that of class consciousness and consciousness in, and of, crisis.

Though regressive utopian myths of transparency, as well as depoliticising fantasies of machinic administration, may be channelled more or less unconsciously by communist politics, the notions of social transparency that it generates, in particular as regards the transparency of planning as against the unintelligible anarchy of capitalism, have to be treated as *determinate* and not *generic* negations of capitalism in crisis. The cognitive, economic or artistic figurations of a transparency of the social must therefore always be thought in counterpoint to the opacity of capitalism – the very opacity that is not only celebrated but operationalised in the 'aesthetics' of classical and neoclassical, as well as neoliberal, political economy.

Dialectical cinema and divisive symptoms

This was a problem that dogged some of Lukács's communist contemporaries, most importantly perhaps Sergei Eisenstein and Brecht. Eisenstein's abortive project to film *Das Kapital*, what he somewhat churlishly called a 'new work on a libretto by Karl Marx', was envisaged as an attempt not to narrate or depict the structure and dynamic of Marx's argument but to appropriate its method for cinema – and in particular to take the

everyday experience of crisis as an occasion for a *filmic dialectic of the abstract and the concrete*, incorporating an affective dimension of pathos and shock specific to film.

Against 'abstract formal experiment', Eisenstein proposed sequences that encapsulate a theoretical movement: 'Somewhere in the West. A factory where it is possible to pinch parts and tools. No search of workers made. Instead, the exit gate is a magnetic check point. No comment needed' (Eisenstein 1976, 9). The method had a didactic aim: to teach the worker to think dialectically. Which is to say not to present capitalism as a stable, intelligible system, but to develop the cognitive organs to think through and against its crisis-prone and contradictory structure, to provide what the Soviet director called a 'visual instruction in the dialectical method', an instrument of 'dialectical decoding': 'The most important tasks in a cultural revolution', writes Eisenstein in his notes, 'are not only dialectical demonstrations but instruction in the dialectical method, as well' (Eisenstein 1976, 26). To approximate the dialectic in film, it was thus necessary to break with a model of representation founded on 'thematic imagery' (though it is worth noting, in contrast to Dziga Vertov, that Eisenstein still depended strongly on forms of symbolism, as when he notes: 'A balalaika and a Menshevik "resemble" each other not physically but abstractly') (Eisenstein 1976, 12).

The method of this film is thus one that, so to speak, descends from the concrete to the abstract, and ascends from the abstract to the concrete, mediating the conjunction of apparent clarity and real opacity of banal everyday life with the complex, conceptual unity of capital:

The first, preliminary *structural* draft of CAPITAL would mean taking a banal development of a perfectly unrelated event. Say, 'A day in a man's life,' or something perhaps even more banal. And the elements of this chain serve as points of departure for the forming of associations through which alone the play of concepts becomes possible. The idea of this banal intrigue was arrived at in a truly constructive manner. [...] The maximum abstractness of an expanding idea appears particularly bold when presented as an offshoot from extreme concreteness – the banality of life. [...] Joyce may be helpful for my purpose: from a bowl of soup to the British vessels sunk by England. (Eisenstein 1976, 15)

The chain of associations is a movement from the particular to the universal: 'Completely idiotic (all right in the first stages of a working

hypothesis): in the third part (for instance), association moves from the pepper with which she seasons food. Pepper. Cayenne. Devil's Island. Dreyfus. French chauvinism. *Figaro* in Krupp's hands' (Eisenstein 1976, 17). To achieve this, one has to think of montage as unifying – in a dialectical class vision – a multiplicity of seemingly disparate events, what Lukács had called *divisive symptoms*: 'The "ancient" cinema was shooting one event from many points of view. The new one assembles *one point* of view from many events' (Eisenstein 1976, 18).

To know catastrophe

Brecht had articulated crisis and representation, the representation of crisis and the crisis of representation, in an even more determined way. As in Lukács, we encounter a specific aesthetic valorisation of crisis as a moment of complex revelation. As Brecht wrote in 'On the Popularity of the Crime Novel' (1938):

We gain our knowledge of life in a catastrophic form. It is from catastrophes that we have to infer the manner in which our social formation functions. Through reflection, we must deduce the 'inside story' of crises, depressions, revolutions, and wars. We already sense from reading the newspapers (but also bills, letters of dismissal, call-up papers and so forth) that somebody must have done something for the evident catastrophe to have taken place. So what then has been done and by whom? Behind the reported events, we suspect other occurrences about which we are not told. These are the real occurrences. If we knew these incidents, we would understand. Only History can inform us about these real occurrences – insofar as the protagonists have not succeeded in keeping them completely secret. History is written after catastrophes. The basic situation, in which intellectuals feel that they are objects and not subjects of History, forms the thought, which they can display for enjoyment in the crime story. Existence depends upon unknown factors. 'Something must have happened', 'something is brewing', 'a situation has arisen' – this is what they feel, and the mind goes out on patrol. But enlightenment only comes, if at all, after the catastrophe. The death has taken place. What had been fermenting beforehand? What had happened? Why has a solution arisen? All this can now be deduced. (Brecht, in Mandel 1984, 72–73)

But, just as reflection on industrial photography instructs us that a

naive realism is disarmed before the complexity of capital,² so the dramatisation and figuration of its contradictory, mutating logic imposes formidable tasks upon the artist, and upon our unreflected conceptions of agency, character, plot, and so on:

Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. Can we speak of money in the form of iambics? 'The Mark, first quoted yesterday at 50 dollars, now beyond 100, soon may rise, etc.' – how about that? Petroleum resists the five-act form; today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises; the 'heroes' change with the different phases, are interchangeable, etc.; the graph of people's actions is complicated by abortive actions; fate is no longer a single coherent power; rather there are fields of force which can be seen radiating in opposite directions; the power of groups themselves comprise movements not only against one another but within themselves, etc., etc. (Brecht, in Willett 1978, 30)

As his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann noted, recalling Brecht's work on a play on the Chicago wheat stock exchange:

We gathered the technical materials. I myself made inquiries of several specialists as well as of the exchange in Breslau and Vienna, and at the end Brecht himself began to study political economy. He asserted that the machinations of the money market were quite impenetrable – he would have to find out how matters really stood, so far as the theories of money were concerned. Before, however, making what for him were important discoveries in that field, he recognized that the current dramatic forms were not suited to reflecting such modern processes as the world distribution of wheat or the life-story of our times – in a word, all human actions of consequence. 'These questions', Brecht said, 'are not dramatic in our sense of the word, and if they are transported into literature, are no longer true, and drama is no longer drama. When we become aware that our world no longer fits into

2 'The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed'. Brecht 2004, quoted in Benjamin 2005, 526.

drama, then drama no longer fits into our world'. (Hauptmann, in Ewen 1992, 160–61)

This predicament, when 'drama no longer fits into our world', when the intelligibility and legibility of crisis is threatened by a crisis in the intelligibility and legibility of the world, has to be regarded as the spur and context for attempts, both in the arts and in social practice more broadly, to experiment with what a transparent society might mean.

The aesthetics of the plan and the limits of transition

Many of the utopian schemes that emerged in the wake of 1917 and in the midst of civil war and war communism combined the euphoria of world-transformation with a cult of unified and regimented machinic culture which can only be conceived of in terms of the brutal backwardness, and catastrophic condition, of the Soviet economy, which was in effect undergoing an unprecedented *de*-industrialisation (see Stites 1988). The quasi-religious character of invocations of Taylor and Ford, the attempt to fashion a 'new man' out of the devastated human material of the post-war years is well-documented, famously finding its dystopian expression in Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We* (1921). But I think attention to less 'mythical' productions, in the domains of urbanism, architecture and cinema, can allow us to reflect on what an aesthetics of planning and transparency might mean, when it seeks to generate, through a 'cultural revolution', something which, echoing Fredric Jameson's analysis of the problem of representation under late capitalism (Jameson 1991), we could provisionally term *socialist cognitive mapping*. This can in turn provide a way of criticising, in the aesthetic register, the one-dimensional and ahistorical character of the accusation of transparency, levelled at Marxism, communism and socialism.

Conceived of in terms of planning, rather than as a messianic social vision, 'transparency' ties together the questions of class consciousness, economic control and political direction in a way that permits us to explore the 'aesthetics of the economy' as a crucial node for any reflection on the meaning of a transition out of capitalism. Ironically, perhaps, the most effective statement I have come across about planning envisioned as a politically vital form of socialist cognitive mapping is to be found in a 50-year old text by Perry Anderson, in the *New Left Review*, about Swedish social democracy. Anderson foregrounds the status of the plan as instrument, field and object of a cultural and political transformation.

‘In its ultimate significance’, he writes, ‘the plan is not a rationalisation of resources, it is a revelation of values’ – or, we could say, a mechanism for making the social essence transpire through its forms of appearance. In contrast, to the impossibility within capitalism of a *situational representation of one’s being* and activity in terms of the invisible but constraining totality:

The plan decodes the vast, interlocking, impenetrable, inspissated economy and ascribes a lucid meaning to every one of the myriad cryptic gestures which compose it. It renders the entire work-force transparent to itself as engaged in one task, so that each member of it can see how his own task complements and completes that of all the others and is in turn carried beyond itself by them. [...] Everything possible should be done to maximise the transparency of social construction, and the local community has a crucial role to play here: the national plan should be routed wherever possible via a complex of local plans which realise in the most vivid and immediate way the interdependence of work in the community (profits from local concerns to go directly to the financing of local flats, schools, concert-halls, etc.). [...] Transparency is one of the crucial defining characteristics of socialism: a community in which all the multiple mediations between our public and private existence are visible, where each social event can be seen right back to its source, and legible human intentions read everywhere on the face of the world. (Anderson 1961, 44)

Now, if we approach the aesthetics of the plan as it emerges in some of the key political and artistic debates in the wake of the Russian Revolution, we can both note the poverty of the usual criticisms of communism as a messianism which fantasises a society without contradiction, antagonism and so on, *and* identify the thorny and at times tragic problems thrown up by the attempt to create an aesthetics of the plan which would at one and the same time serve as a form of pedagogy (‘production propaganda’, as Lenin would have it) and as an experimentation in form. By analogy with Lukács’s own antinomies of bourgeois thought, we could identify here something like three antinomies of communist aesthetics: (1) the combination of a radical subordination of the proletariat as labourer to an exaltation of the proletariat as future administrator of communism; (2) the tension that inhabits a humanism striving, to repeat Anderson’s phrase, to make it so that ‘legible human intentions [are] read everywhere on the face of the world’; (3) the aestheticisation of the economic plan in the context of a world capitalist economy.

The first problem is at the heart of Robert Linhart's arresting study, from 1976, of the conjunctural and contradictory character of Lenin's thought and politics post-1917, *Lénine, les paysans, Taylor* – a book quite unique in its combination of a real appreciation of Lenin with a welcome rejection of the comforting apologias of Leninism. This chapter, entitled 'The Railways: The Emergence of the Soviet Ideology of the Labour-Process', recounts how, in the context of the famine, the authoritarian Taylorist turn in the organisation of work was driven through in that sector which provided the vital hinge between production, services and administration, and whose critical disorganisation was exacerbated by the very autonomous workers' organisation that had previously made it into a hub of anti-Tsarist agitating, and which now appeared as a kind of economic blackmail, all the more menacing in that it took place within the crisis of the civil war. The Bolsheviks, he notes, were 'almost instinctively attentive to everything that concerns communication, flow, circuits' (Linhart 2010, 151).

In this moment, the railways appeared as the nerve-fibres and life-blood of a 'state in movement', and militarised centralisation, planning and labour discipline as imperatives – as evidenced, among others, by Trotsky's 'order 1042', viewed by Linhart as the first key instance of state planning. After all, 'if there is an activity that must, by nature, function as a single mechanism, one that is perfectly regulated, standardised and unified throughout the country, it's the railway system' (162). The seemingly inevitable Taylorisation of the railways both forges and deforms the USSR, especially in furthering the split, thematised by Linhart, between the proletarian as political *subject* and the proletarian as *object* of an iron discipline. Among the critical sites of the necessary fixation on logistics (namely, on railways and electrification) are the films of Dziga Vertov, which promise a cognitive mapping that would join the Taylorist decomposition of labour, imaged as 'a regular, uninterrupted flow of communication', and its subjective mastery, in which the 'transparency of the productive process' (169) is provided to each worker in the guise of an all-penetrating vision.

Vertov's films are the locus of a kind of physiological pedagogy, a refashioning of the proletarian nervous system aimed at educating the eye of the spectator, decoding the world through an inhuman kino-eye that can nevertheless permit workers to see the totality and themselves form a totality. As Vertov wrote in *Kinopravda & Radiopravda* (1925):

The textile worker ought to see the worker in a factory making a

machine essential to the textile worker. The worker at the machine tool plant ought to see the miner who gives his factory its essential fuel, coal. The coal miner ought to see the peasant who produces the bread essential for him. Workers ought to see one another so that a close, indissoluble bond can be established among them. (Vertov 1984, 52)

But normal propaganda and pedagogy, based on the whims and character of writers and instructors, are insufficient. 'How, therefore, can the workers see one another? Kino-eye pursues precisely this goal of establishing a visual bond between the workers of the whole world' (52). Note that, to touch on my second antinomy, this proletarian humanism is predicated on a technical anti-humanism, on 'the emancipation of the camera, which is reduced to a state of pitiable slavery, of subordination to the imperfections and the shortsightedness of the human eye' (14), as 'the mechanical eye, the camera, reject[s] the human eye as crib sheet [and] gropes its way through the chaos of visual events' (19).

But this pedagogical emancipation through the machine – which in Vertov's *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), a visual poem to Gostorg, the foreign trade department of the Soviet Union, is punctuated by the call for 'you', 'sitting in the audience', 'the master of the soviet land', 'knee deep in grain', to assume 'your immense wealth' and contribute to the plan to accelerate the growth of the Soviet economy through trade with capitalism – is also predicated on an obfuscation of labour or of the possibility of emancipatory agency. The state is ubiquitous but in a sense invisible, while labour is decomposed into the ideal of, as Linhart puts it, 'a regular, uninterrupted flow of communication: productive activities are strictly interdependent – extraction, transport of fuel, transformation of wood, stone, iron' (Linhart 2010, 166).

The visual analysis decomposes labour but removes its proper logic and complexity, as well as its agency, creating an abstract labour subsumed by the flow and the plan. For Linhart, this matches Lenin's own attempt to square the circle in the state of political and economic emergency that characterised the late teens and twenties: the hope of a Taylorism that could be appropriated and transvalued by the masses. This is evident in Vertov's attempt to give to each worker a vision of the whole, which for Linhart suffers from the same problem as Lenin's project: the collectivisation of labour is not essentially grounded on a redistribution of agency, of workers' control, but on the mutual publicity of work. It could be said that the class consciousness thus generated is more of a passive revelation

than a mutation in the articulation between the individual and the collective, the overall system and local situations. The transparency of the productive system puts 'the people' at the helm but workers qua workers remain subordinated to the exigencies of the plan. Publicity and agency are disjoined, while 'the double play of the rational evidence of tasks and the habit of carrying them out without constraint would reduce the place and importance of decisions properly so-called' (Linhart 2010, 174).

The Italian Marxist architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri in his 1971 essay 'Realised socialism and the crisis of the avant-gardes' is even harsher on this count, arguing, not entirely fairly perhaps, that the works of El Lissitzky and Vertov's *Kinopravda* are 'attempts to manage one's own alienation'. Vertov's effort to create a kind of cognitive, nervous and erotic union of man and machine through cinema would thus reveal:

the ultimate aim of the productive avant-garde. It is the collective, the class, which is now called upon to *become machine*, to identify with production. Productivism is indeed a product of the avant-garde: but it is the project of the conciliation between Capital and Labour, operated through the reduction of labour-power to an obedient and mute cog of the comprehensive machine. (Tafuri 1971, 51)

The further result is that in turning formal experimentation into a productive instrument any of its anti-ideological, demystifying character is lost. By 'attributing to the proletariat the historical task of reintegrating Man with himself and his social environment, the recuperation of a re-sacralised work understood as no longer alienated translates directly into the *ideology of organisation*, the Plan' (58). This project loses, according to Tafuri, Lenin's affirmation, however precarious, of the need *not* to erase the class within the Plan, to retain an exteriority between the proletariat and the instruments of valorisation of fixed Capital. This is what vanishes, it could be argued, in works like *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), which subordinates the mapping of the Soviet economy, and of its indigenous peoples, to a peculiarly paradoxical if eminently realist goal, that of maximising production for export to capitalist countries (and thus, one imagines, the exploitation of the Soviet proletariat, not to mention nature) in order to accelerate the building of a socialism whose one condition is the maximisation of fixed capital, or, as the film relentlessly reminds us in the second person singular and plural, 'machines that build machines'.

All of the contradictions of socialist cognitive mapping, in its Soviet phase, are here: the exaltation of labour and its subsumption to the plan; humanism (anti-colonialism, mastery over collective fate, Vertov's characteristic attention to faces, expressions and moments of happiness) and anti-humanism (the subordination of the former to the flow of logistics and the accumulation of fixed capital); capitalist trade as a precondition for socialist construction. The problems of cognitive mapping in socialist transition thus turn out to be even more complex, if markedly different, than those thrown up by capitalism's distinctive modalities of opacity and invisibility.

II

Subjects

DIWY!

Precarity in Embodied Capitalism

Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos¹

Recombinant bodies

‘Embodied capitalism’ designates the centrality of the body and materiality in the current labour regime, and highlights the neglected embodied character of work. There are many exceptions to the omission of the body in the sociology of labour and social theory, exceptions which are crucial for our understanding of the regime of labour control. The most important reside in the long tradition of feminist research on affects and bodies at work (Glucksmann 2000; Wolkowitz 2006; McDowell, Batnitzky and Dyer 2007), on women’s work and affective labour (Kessler-Harris 1981; Morini 2007; Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2002) and on the relation between technoscientific practices and human bodies (Bowker and Star 1999; Mol 2002; Suchman 2007). The creation of value in embodied capitalism occurs by recombining and intermingling matter: humans, animals, artefacts and things. Importantly, recombination also includes the workers’ bodies; it reorganises their materialities, abilities, social relations, their capacities to affect and relate to other bodies, their potentialities; and, finally, it fractures this configuration and appropriates only specific parts of it.

Our concern here is with how life’s recombination necessitates the reorganisation of labour relations – and not with how life itself becomes

1 This chapter would not have been possible without the collaboration with Niamh Stephenson and our common work in earlier publications and in particular in Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008.

a productive force (for example, see Sunder Rajan 2006; Waldby and Mitchell 2006). There is a widespread assumption that productivity in embodied capitalism is the outcome of the 'cooperation between brains' (as the paradigm of cognitive capitalism or knowledge-based capitalism proclaims, e.g., Corsani 2004; Gorz 2004; Lazzarato 2004; Moulier Boutang 2001). This assumption hinges on the belief that the recombinant formation of life is the complex product of workers' intellectual and cognitive capacities. But beyond this, life becomes recombinant not only on the level of the product but also on the level of production itself. It is through the reorganisation of the body – that is, of its intrinsic structure and of its connections to other human bodies, machines, animals and things – that the productivity of labour can be sustained in Global North Atlantic societies.

Precarious labour

In the post-Second World War period, labour regulation in Global North Atlantic countries was chiefly a matter for the welfare state. The welfare state's productivity resulted from transforming the vertical asymmetry of the class conflict into a horizontal arrangement of rights and resources for the protection of labour (Ewald 1986; Castel 2003). In addition to this, the welfare state's provision extended beyond the immediate regulation of normal wage-labour to include protecting the life of the working individual (and his, and more seldom of her, immediate dependants) in non-working phases (Kaufmann 2003). This regime of protection was based on the continual increase of labour productivity in the context of a nationally organised economy. The internationalisation of financial markets brought this form of labour regulation into perennial dysfunction (Jessop 1994). Productivity used to be driven by mass consumption, consumption which was regulated by the supply and demand of a certain national economy. The internationalisation of production and of financial markets rendered any nationally maintained order of labour relations increasingly inadequate (Hitz et al. 1995). This was a direct attack on the fiscal grounds of the nation's welfare systems. Capital's escape from national boundaries created new global spaces of transnational governance; and with this shift, nationally organised Fordist modes of regulating labour started to dissolve and sink into crisis (Lipietz 1998). The neoliberal project attempted to transform socially guaranteed forms of labour protection into the individual duty of the solo entrepreneurial labourer.

If neoliberalism is the market-driven institutionalisation of insecurity, its consequences are the decline of normal wage-labour and the constant expansion of zones of insecure employment relations. Precarity designates this exact situation in the labour market. That is, precarity delineates how the multiplication of insecure and non-standardised forms of employment gradually becomes central to labour in contemporary capitalist conditions of Global North Atlantic societies. This trend affects workers' employment relations and social relations, their fears and desires and avenues for people's participation in public discourse and civil society (Gallie and Paugam 2003; Rodgers and Rodgers 1989).

Contemporary sociological research on insecure employment relations casts precarious labour as the proliferation of atypical and irregular work relations, which: (a) are contract-based, part-time or short-term employment; (b) are product-oriented – usually in the form of subcontracted labour, project-based jobs, freelance work – and paid by the quality of the product the worker delivers; (c) are organised beyond existing structures of social welfare systems such as unemployment benefit, social security, health insurance, services for maternity leave etc.; (d) are characterised by an increased mobility, global or regional as well as national; (e) intensify the trans-sectorial mobility of workers; (f) range from underpaid jobs (constituting the working poor) to highly paid executive jobs (elitist 'cognitariat'); (g) and finally, work that is non-unionised, although there have been some attempts to connect with traditional trade unions.

The concept of precarity carries its own risks. Our particular concern here is with its use as a sociological or cultural category, a use we have introduced in the previous paragraphs. Sociological analyses of precarity are useful to the extent that they articulate and describe the proliferation of features such as affective labour, networking, collaboration, the knowledge economy etc. into what mainstream sociology calls the knowledge economy or the network society (Lazzarato 1996a; Castells 1996; Gorz 2004). But this kind of sociological description is very different from an operative political conceptualisation of precarity which is situated in co-research and political activism (Negri 2006; Colectivo Precarias a la Deriva 2004) and which draws upon immediate interventions into the power dynamics of labour relations in contemporary European post-Fordist societies. When the sole use of the concept of precarity is to diagnose the present contradictions of production, the concept's role in conjuring up alternative modes of experiencing and in mobilising alternative forms of action in the present is neglected. If

precarious workers have their own distinct sources of pride, respect and autonomy, they are not being discussed or interrogated in contemporary sociological research on precarity.

Zora

Zora came to Germany on a tourist visa at the age of 19, following the war in the former Yugoslavia, and lived for many years as a 'sans papier'. She forged an existence through a wide variety of jobs, sometimes concurrent, in household services, the catering trade and boutiques. We want to present Zora's account of domestic work as illustrative of the inadequacies of concepts which cast the experience of precarious workers as the end-product of relations of exploitation. After a while in Germany, Zora found herself being positioned in the labour market in a degrading way, her qualifications were being ignored and she also experienced the denigration and disdain associated with the racist 'Slav' tag. As she put it:

When I arrived in Germany I felt quite normal and then I noticed that I wasn't normal somehow. Here [in Germany], I am something [...] bad [...] Then there were cleaning jobs where people felt superior and they thought Slavs were inferior and me a cleaning lady and then from a crisis area, I was just rubbish for them. And I sometimes felt very bad, like I was carrying a heavy stone on my back as I washed the floors. At that time nothing could touch me. So I bent down and cleaned and felt bad, but at that time I just couldn't *allow myself* to think about it, like: 'Have I been badly treated or not?' Because I just mightn't have had the strength to come back again. I only started thinking about it much later, when I could allow myself. (Interview with Zora, 9 December 2007)

If we read Zora's account with a view to understanding contemporary relations of production we see only the particular forms of exploitation, the racism and the disdain to which Zora is being subjected. From this perspective, not '*allow[ing her]self* to think' seems like a form of denial on Zora's part. Whilst tragic portrayals of precarity can offer useful insights into contemporary labour control (Berlant 2007), they can only neglect or misread people's gestures towards (or even concrete accounts of) experience lived *beyond* these relations of exploitation. In the midst of Zora's account of pervasive subjection we have her startling contention that 'at that time nothing could touch me'. Rather than assume that this is a tragic or naive claim of someone who is striving to maintain face, we

want to maintain the possibility that Zora is generously sharing a tactic of dis-identification: Zora reproduces, and at the same time undoes, the gendered and racialised orders which accompany every single minute of precarious labour.

What we read in Zora's account is the necessity to refuse the deterministic tendency to collapse the experiences of precarious workers into the conditions in which precarity is lived (for an extensive account of this, see Renate Lorenz's discussion of Hannah Cullwick's diaries in this volume). For instance, by drawing on the idea of 'sexual work' (Lorenz and Kuster 2007; Boudry, Kuster and Lorenz 1999), we can acknowledge that although there is an inextricable link between Zora's sexuality and work, the relation is neither linear nor pre-determined. Specific workplaces require not only precise skills but also particular embodiments of gender and sexuality. Zora acts as a silent/silenced analyst of the present – as a modest witness, you could say – who renders explicit the 'unspoken contracts' through which the symbolic orders of ethnicity, national affiliation and heteronormativity are reproduced and negotiated in the workplace. So the embodiment of affect which Zora does while working is not the result of the pure enactment of 'labour' skills or of information exchange or knowledge-oriented interactions (as many would argue; see, for example, Virno 2003). Rather, this 'sexual labour' (Lorenz and Kuster 2007) is permanently and inherently sustained through heteronormative and ethnicising/racist social formations. Hence, while working, we always create an indeterminate surplus of informal world-making investments which are not only related to work but also to its gendered and racialised order. However, Zora constantly decodes this order so that she can remain 'untouched by it'. In so doing, not only does she silently expose the relation between labour, gender and race which sustains domestic work, she also *exceeds* this mode of labour control by insisting on bringing aspects of 'untouched' experience to work, experience which remains beyond regulation. Moreover, Zora experiences her precarity as a set of careful moves which develop new relations and spaces for action through a complex and unstable balance between freedom, desire, coercion and often violence (Kuster 2006; Kuster and Tsianos 2007).

Time and excess

To avoid just another apolitical sociological category, we want to focus on the ruptures, blockades and 'line[s] of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004

[1980], 9–10), which are immanent in the configuration of precarious labour. It is misleading to assert that the sociological features of precarious labour such as informality, cooperation, creativity, affectivity etc. *constitute* precarious subjects. Today's emergent labour subjectivities do not coalesce into one unified social actor with the same position in production and the same characteristics. These subjectivities do not simply mirror the proliferation of precarity, nor are they the end-product of shifts in the organisation of labour. These emergent subjectivities are the ground on which the embodied experience of precarity is lived. The embodied experience of precarity *exceeds* the conditions of production entailed in precarious labour.

Precarious subjectivities simultaneously evoke the contingent intensities of the production process and the intrinsic possibilities for overcoming its oppressive structures. There is always an excess of sociability and subjectivity in precarious lives which does not directly correspond to the immediate conditions of work. There is nothing mystical about this excess of sociability and subjectivity. It arises in the core of precarious conditions of work, i.e., when there is a gap between work and its remuneration, a gap in which people have to live their actual lives. There is no monetary equivalent to the labour productivity of each individual precarious labourer (consider Dyer-Witherford's inspiring work, Dyer-Witherford 1999; see also Gorz 2004) – and this despite fierce attempts to quantify and measure production outcomes of project work, intellectual labour, cultural products, affective labour, care work, domestic labour etc. (indicatively, see De Angelis and Harvie 2006). And, by investing in this incommensurable gap, people create an excess to the work they do. People mobilise social and personal investments in order to produce (e.g., social relations, skills, informal networks, ideas) – some of this is entailed in the 'final product' of their labour, but much remains outside of it. Of course, this excess can be harnessed and redirected to create new forms of capital – the next product. But, equally, this excess of continuous experience enables a form of politics which is not already absorbed into the current regime of regulation.

This excess operates primarily on the level of time. Fordist regulation was secured in anticipation of workers' productivity such that this mode of regulation operates independently of its immediate productivity. The protectionism of the welfare system functions through time management, by anticipating and securing the periods when someone becomes non-productive (through accident and illness, unemployment or age). In precarity this lifelong scope in the process of time management

disappears. It is eroded in part because the future is no longer guaranteed as before, but also because the future is already appropriated into the present (Ehrenstein 2006b). Naturally, the Fordist regime also exploits the future; but here the process of exploitation occurs in the employment contract which secures the possibility of exploitation beyond the moment of the present. In contrast, in post-Fordism, we encounter a re-configuration and intensification of the exploitation of the future (Priddat 2002). As employment contracts become flexible and increasingly insecure, the exploitation of the future is sustained through the *break* of the bond of the contract rather than through the contract itself.

This results in an amplification of dependency: one is under increased pressure to ensure that one's future capacity to be 'productive' will be compatible with the demands of the market (lifelong learning, continuous acquisition of skills, expanded qualification and innovation are keywords in this process). So the absence of permanent (or even long) contractual employment increases exploitation: one is not only exploited by others but also by one's self, 'exploitation of the self' (Ehrenstein 2006a). This post-contractual form of dependency is twofold: it is a dependency on the employer who offers limited contracts as well as a dependency on oneself to increase one's own capacity to get such contracts in the future. Zora's account, which we presented earlier, exemplifies this: Zora can always refuse to work in a certain job but she can only do this if she has already secured or at least planned possibilities to sustain herself in the future through informal self-organised protection measures. Post-contractual dependency is the result of the exploitation of the future through the intensification of one's own efforts in the present to expand one's own capacity in anticipation of future demands of the market. This is what we mean when we say that the future is already exploited in the present.

Precarious subjectivities

Precarious social subjectivities emerge through the internalisation of the social conflicts and ambivalences of living labour in the regime of embodied capitalism. Precarious subjectivities represent the attempts to live with incessant neoliberal imperatives to transform the self. Such imperatives proliferate in embodied capitalism. There is a tension between the neoliberal imperatives to transform the self, as experienced in embodied capitalism, and the experiences of *how* these imperatives are embodied and lived in the everyday (depicted below in Table 6.1). We can see non-linear connections between: (a) embodied capitalism's ongoing

flexibility together with the absence of any form of protection and people's experiences of intense vulnerability; (b) the imperative to accommodate constant availability and precarious workers' hyperactivity; (c) the need to demonstrate the ability to manage the different tempi and velocities of multiple tasks and precarious workers' experiences of simultaneity; (d) processes through which one's own body is reorganised to accommodate multi-local environments, the crossing of various networks, social spaces and available resources on the one hand, and the embodiment of recombination on the other; (e) the constant reinvention of an adaptable, versatile, polymorphic but finally unquestionable heteronormative matrix and an increase in fluid intimacies between people; (f) the imperative to cope with and compress the overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity and feelings of restlessness; (g) the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines and people's unsettledness; (h) the centrality of emotional exploitation, or, emotional intelligence, for the control of employability and multiple dependencies and feelings of affective exhaustion; (i) the imperative to be cynical, energetic, attractive, pragmatic, trained, all in all a bold doer and reckless professional by being cunning, deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, imaginative, a trickster.

Table 6.1 *Neoliberal imperatives to transform the self*

Neoliberal transformation (imperative of the self)	Precarious subjectivity
unprotected flexibility	vulnerability
availability	hyperactivity
multitasking	simultaneity
multi-locality	recombination
polytropic heteronormativity	fluid intimacies
communicative abundance	restlessness
incessant mobility	unsettledness
emotional intelligence	affective exhaustion
cynical professionalism	cunning

Value creation in embodied capitalism

Connections and endless combinations of these modes of being create a myriad of singular experiences entailed in living and working in precarious conditions: the embodied experiences of a chain worker in a high-street fashion shop, of a student paying tuition fees by working as a security guard, of an illegalised migrant who works as a dish washer, a domestic worker or sex worker, of a qualified researcher who works on contract-based research projects, of an unemployed academic who works in a call centre or in an unpaid internship, of an au pair worker who wants to stay in the country after the expiration of a contract, of a migrant computer expert who works as babysitter, of a non-unionised tube cleaner, of a volunteer doing an internship in a cultural institution (and not only works for free but her working conditions are not covered by any collective framework whatsoever), of an architect who earns a living working in discontinuous projects, of a seasonal worker in the strawberry fields, of a cinematographer who works on three projects simultaneously and is paid (badly) for only one, of a single mother working part-time, of a graphic designer whose work extends far beyond the ten hours she stays in the office. All these experiences vary immensely, but at the same time they are all permeated by a pervasive social conflict: it is *a conflict between high productivity and low protection*, or else intensive creativity and deep vulnerability. That is, on the one hand, all these various embodied experiences of precarity constitute the primary terrain on which embodied capitalism's value creation takes place in Global North Atlantic societies. On the other, they are all confronted with the structural insecurity imposed by the system of a nationally organised compromise of normal wage-labour (that is, full-time, long-term wage labour).

The system of wage-labour and the corresponding welfare system produced a space-fixated work subjectivity (i.e., normal, full-time, wage employment) measured according to work time. Precarious labour implodes this subjectivity on various levels: it is not space-fixated, the precarious worker works in a multiplicity of locales; his/her work cannot be quantified and remunerated according to the system of wage-labour measurement; finally, the experiences of precarious workers cannot be accommodated in the unified subjectivity germane to the national social compromise of normal employment. Precarious labour exists only in the plural, as a multiplicity of experiences variously positioned, exploited, and lived in the system of embodied capitalism, and not as a unified subjectivity or 'precariat'.

The creation of value in embodied capitalism is not the result of the valorisation of labour power but of the whole continuum of the embodied experience of precarity. In industrial capitalism, value is created by the appropriation of the strictly measured labour power of the worker. The worker is remunerated *only* for his/her labour power, not for the entirety of his/her life (e.g., domestic labour remains largely unpaid or little consideration is given to the support or the immediate social context necessary for sustaining the worker's ability to produce). In contrast, value in embodied capitalism is created by the appropriation of the whole of the worker's life and social relations, that is his/her relations of care, sociability, capacity to be mobile, ability to constantly expand his/her skills. Yet further clarification is required because this is not completely accurate. There is a widespread argument about the transformation from industrial to post-industrial capitalism which describes the appropriation of labour as the appropriation of the worker's subjectivity in its entirety (Beck 2000; Gorz 2004; Schönberger and Springer 2003; Sennett 1998; Lazzarato 2004; Virno 2003). But this is not correct. The precarious regime of labour regulation recombines the working subject and exploits specific segments of his or her everyday existence *on a case-by-case basis*. Embodied capitalism does not actually exploit the totality of the worker's experience; it dissects the subject and the entirety of his/her life and appropriates only certain parts of it. It is through these very means of dissecting, selecting, appropriating and discarding subjectivities that control is achieved in precarity. Regulation entails abandoning the subject as a whole and recombining it, or parts of it.

What is recombined by contemporary capitalism is the worker's embodied experience. In this situation, capitalism is no longer concerned with the calibration and management of the individual as part of a population, it is not even concerned with fabricating individuality in the guise of disciplinary institutions but rather attacks individuality *en gros* (see also Papadopoulos 2004). Its new role is to dissect and dissolve the working subject and recombine it into new effective virtual compositions. Capitalism no longer deals with the link between subject, agency and power; it wants to get rid of all three and construct powerful composites which accumulate, in their bodies, different aspects of the public and the private, the natural and the artificial, the personal and the political. The individual only looks like an individual in its apparent bodily shape, but in reality it becomes a genetic source, an automated client, a host to a virus, a set of competencies, a self-creating assemblage of skills, a register and a code, a body capable of extreme mobility.

Inappropriate/d sociabilities of precarious life

What the precarious regime of labour regulation appropriates and remunerates is therefore not the whole subjectivity of the worker, but a de-individualised recombination of skills, qualities and capacities. In Zora's account of domestic work as an illegal migrant what is appropriated is her capacity to perform subjection to the racism of her employer ('So I bent down and cleaned and felt bad'). However, through her dis-identification, what Zora brings to the work – 'drops' of her experience – is not entirely appropriated and regulated ('At that time nothing could touch me'). Precarity describes life in these conditions of recombinant embodied capitalism. Embodied capitalism needs the everyday, but it only needs and can accommodate small segments of what people do in their everyday lives. There is an excess sociability fabricated in embodied capitalism's conflictual process between value creation and recombinant exploitation, and this excess is overlooked. Consider the examples above: embodied capitalism capitalises on the mobility of the au pair worker, and neglects his or her social or political rights, since this person is considered to be in the country of work only provisionally. The regime of embodied capitalism regards migrants' bodies as *naked labour power*, not as mobile subjects of rights. At the same time, this person utilises her capacity to be mobile as an au pair worker to gain the chance to enter the country *and* she uses her informal networks to stay after the expiration of the au pair contract (indicatively, see Hess 2005; Morokvasic, Erel, and Shinozaki 2003; Salih 2003).

Similarly, the creativity of the architect, the cinematographer or the graphic designer stems very much from their capacity to connect, socialise, produce beyond the project in which one is currently involved and paid for. Whilst all these activities and experiences are necessary for work, at the same they exceed what capitalist exploitation wants to and can appropriate. There is always a surplus sociability which remains unexploited in embodied capitalism. This surplus sociability destabilises social regulation, that is, it cannot be fully regulated because it is incompatible with the current system of measurability of labour power (regarding some examples of this, see Ehrenstein 2006b; McRobbie 2004; von Osten 2006; Widuch 2005; Moulrier Boutang 2012).

The illegal migrant dish washer, the seasonal worker in the strawberry fields, the domestic servant or the sex worker all enter the highly exploitative and unregulated conditions of undocumented labour, conditions which embodied capitalism could tackle by assigning unconditional rights for

all workers but refrains from doing so. At the same time, the existence of undocumented labour is the only way for illegalised migrants to sustain their agency, that is to sustain themselves, to cross borders, to establish a new life. It is this possibility to be on the road and at the same time to partake in transnational informal networks of life which cannot be regulated by embodied capitalism (Bell and Berg 2002; Faist 2000; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). Moreover, sustaining networks can make it possible to *refuse* exploitation in undocumented jobs. Again, Zora's account illustrates this possibility. The repeated ironic remarks of her boss, 'Oh, you poor thing, you got no tips again', after he had deducted them himself while helping out due to lack of staff, elicited this response from Zora one day:

then I, well, one day I'd really just had enough, so I gave in my notice and said 'there you go, now do it yourself, since you think you can do it all by yourself anyhow and its only *me that can't* because of the way *I am*, then help yourself, I am *illegal*, I don't owe you anything, so you have no rights over me, go ahead, just do it yourself, I'm gone' and I really left him in the lurch one evening, he just went crazy [grins]. (Interview with Zora, 9 December 2007)

The single mother, the unemployed academic working in a call centre or the migrant computer expert working as a babysitter enter the job market in vulnerable positions in which they are under-employed. The gendered division of labour is mainly sustained by dismantling social systems of protection, a move which creates the conditions for the single mother's exploitation in a flexibilised labour market. Here, embodied capitalism dissects, extracts and appropriates, on an *ad hoc* basis, people's feminised social skills in undertaking affective and communicative labour; what is left behind includes people's multiple skills and abilities and the social inequalities which maintain the gendered division between feminised and masculine labour patterns (see Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Shome 2006).

In the case of the working student or the researcher on a contract employment, they both actively participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge, while this knowledge is appropriated by senior members of staff and the institutions by which they are employed. Not only the student and academic, but also the single mother who works part-time in a lawyer's office, the computer expert from Bulgaria who (because her diploma is not recognised in her new country of residence) works as a babysitter, or the unemployed English graduate

who experiences the pressure to change his accent in order to hide his background from the international callers – all of them are variously exploited on a case-by-case basis, according to the particularities of their lived embodied situatedness. Extreme insecurity and flexibilisation do not pertain only to the experiences of the chainworker but increasingly they come to characterise previously secure jobs in the industrial sector. Precarity becomes a highly adaptive pattern of labour regulation across different sectors of production. The entirety of all of these precarious workers' experiences and subjectivities is neither appropriate nor appropriated. Much is jettisoned.

All of these examples suggest how embodied capitalism extracts what is essential for creating value from the highly diversified subjectivities of these workers, and at the same time it retreats from any responsibility for accommodating the complexities of these workers' lives. There is an excess of social relations in the field of precarious life conditions, a plethora of what artist and theorist Trinh T. Min-ha has called 'inappropriate/d' sociabilities, which is the main source for value creation, and, at the same time, this excess cannot be regulated by the regime of precarity. The term inappropriate/d sociability refers to a twofold form of sociability: on the one hand, a sociability which exceeds what can be appropriated for the purposes of value creation in embodied capitalism; on the other hand, something which is incommensurable with, that is inappropriate to, the current regime of labour regulation (Minh-ha 1987; Haraway 1992). The embodied experience of precarity exists and operates in the heart of the existing system of production while it simultaneously entails something which is inappropriate/d because it exists in a vacuum of control, in a new imperceptible world in the heart of the embodied capitalist world of control: World 2 (Papadopoulos 2006). Haraway comments on what is 'inappropriate/d':

Designating the networks of multicultural, ethnic, racial, national, and sexual actors emerging since World War II, Trinh's phrase referred to the historical positioning of those who cannot adopt the mask of either 'self' or 'other' offered by previously dominant, modern Western narratives of identity and politics. To be 'inappropriate/d' does not mean 'not to be in relation with' – i.e., to be in a special reservation, with the status of the authentic, the untouched, in the allochronic and allotopic condition of innocence. Rather, to be an 'inappropriate/d other' means to be in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality – as

the means of making a potent connection that exceeds domination. To be inappropriate/d is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference. To be inappropriate/d is to be neither modern nor postmodern, but to insist on the amodern. Trinh was looking for a way to figure 'difference' as a 'critical difference within,' and not as special taxonomic marks grounding difference as apartheid. (Haraway 1992, 299)²

The embodied experience of precarity exists *within* the matrix of labour in embodied capitalism and infuses new *constructive relationalities* into it. These are forms of sociability – informal networks of existence, cooperation and social reciprocity, the construction of socio-material artefacts, the transformation of the worker's flesh and abilities – that challenge the process of postliberal control as such. Consider, once again, Zora's account. Zora's constructive relationalities emerge in the complex grids of sociability which arise in conditions of clandestine mobility. Zora tried to come to (Western) Europe three times before she finally managed it. And she managed it through the constructive relationalities which emerged in her networks with other illegal migrants: these connections increased her empowerment in relation to organising jobs without papers, finding passports, meeting 'lads' who are interested in a fake marriage, identifying the cities in Germany where 'tolerant' authorities towards ex-Yugoslavians can be found, accessing medical care at cheap prices. It is through these constructive relationalities that Zora can survive German society's racism, can sustain her body, can protect herself from police violence. These constructive relationalities are not, as many believe, just volatile social relations but strong material and social spaces which cut across the plane of control imposed by the regimes for labour and mobility regulation.

Inappropriate/d sociability thrives on the real fleshly, material social actors of precarity as a force which interrupts the process of labour recombination and introduces assemblages of its own. This cacophony of precarious experiences, bodies and inappropriate/d sociabilities become a stream of decoding, a stream which places the excess of social, material, affective products created through the everyday life of precarious workers in an imperceptible space, a space which resides within without being

2 Here Haraway is referring to the work of artist and theorist Trinh Minh-ha.

coincident with the terrain of regulation. Inappropriate/d sociability is the flesh of the *imperceptible* politics of escape.

Do it without yourself!

Imperceptible politics is not an intentional or teleological act but a means to harness and work with moments of refusal and creativity in precarious lives, as people strive to escape the capture of productionism. Nevertheless, we cannot consider inappropriate/d sociability simply as a counter-power to the regime of control of embodied capitalism. We have already rejected this productionist model which considers the subjectivity of counter-power to be identical with the cycles and structures of production. That is, we cannot extract the subject of historical change from the subject of production. We are tired of this (sort of) Marxist reading of social transformation. The productionist model casts the subjectivity of the precarious worker as the end-product of embodied capitalism. This model wants the exploited class to transform into a counter-power in the form of a class for itself, a class of total expressivity.

However, inappropriate/d sociabilities circulate among not a unified social subject but a multiplicity of actors who question the symbolic and material order of control by creating a new life within this order. What might be presented as a stable, representable subject of precarity actually arises out of (and glosses over) a myriad of imperceptible worlds which materialise in unrepresented actual occasions of precarious experience. The subversive potency of inappropriate/d sociability cannot be understood by positing it as a counter-power to a unitary power of the regime of labour control. Inappropriate/d sociability is not against the regime of labour control but rather works *with* the potentialities entailed in it by creating spaces of sociability which constitute the ground of escape. This is the imperceptible politics in the field of precarity which could create a movement of escape from the contemporary regime of labour regulation. But we know that our considerations about this are not concrete enough to satisfy the people who will ask 'What is to be done today?' or 'How can we mobilise precarious workers?'. We are writing in a moment where the possibilities for new collectivities are present and yet not formed. The collective form of organisation which can challenge the regime of labour regulation in the Global North Atlantic has yet to crystallise. We experience the difficulties of mobilising and organising precarious workers, bringing together different interests and positions and of developing a coherent strategy for intervention in the

field of precarity. But at the same time we learn from these experiences that we can no longer think of the concept of class in Global North Atlantic societies as ultimately resulting from the structure of production (something that would make the fantasy of an emerging collective social actor more easily thinkable).

So, although, at this historical moment, we cannot identify the social actor who will subvert and push the regime of precarious labour beyond itself, we know that this actor will not be formed according to participation, in terms of a given position, in the structure of production. Rather, it will be shaped by the way people participating in precarious labour relate themselves to the products of their work and connect to each other by subverting the meaning of production as such and the content of their own products. The regime of precarious labour selects and inserts singular activities of ever-expanding precarious life into a trajectory of production. Against this, precarious workers in a process of escape attempt to become imperceptible to the productionism of embodied capitalism by creating spaces for the play of purposeless action. Imperceptibility is a form of decoding: decoding the value of a product – that is, de-mystifying how value is generated and subverting attempts to recode the product as useful. Whilst Marx assigns the utility of a product to its intrinsic, almost naturalised, features, the continuously perishing ‘actual occasions’ of embodied experience of precarity call for the denaturalisation of the usefulness of the products of living labour. Purposelessness is a political, material and cultural issue, not one that pertains to some inherent transcendental qualities (or the absence thereof) of the thing which is crafted. What appears purposeless from the productionist perspective of value can be vital for sustaining life. It is the moment in which something incommensurable to the precarious regime of labour regulation, value measurement and value accumulation makes itself present.

A non-natural process of making things is never over-determined, it is immanent socio-materialising. It can be either stabilised and coded according to the productionist regime of recombination in embodied capitalism or it can circulate in unspecified and temporary autonomous spaces of purposelessness. Inappropriate/d sociabilities exist in imperceptible zones: zones where you can make-yourself-without-purpose, cultures of ‘doing it without yourself’: DIWY. Precarity’s moment of escape from embodied capitalism is the moment of being untouched by, of self-evacuation from, the permanent process of auto-commodification. This evacuation posits precarious workers not

as a fixed social class, defined by its function in the production system, but as a tentative community of people in *acts of escaping production*. These people may start from different grounds and may follow different routes; they may ultimately have nothing in common apart from two experiences: first, that their positioning as productive subjects makes them variously exploitable in the regime of embodied capitalism and, second, their practices of escaping this regime of exploitation. That is, the contemporary regime of labour control exists as an attempt to stabilise the flux of the continuous experiences escaping precarity. But any stabilisation can only ever be temporary and is always threatened by the myriad of actual occasions of experience moving not only beyond the precarious regime of labour but also beyond themselves.

Being With, Across, Over and Through: Art's Caring Subjects, Ethics Debates and Encounters

Kirsten Lloyd

As an increasing number of artists site their practice within the social fabric of everyday life, the 'encounter' has been placed at the heart of a newly defined aesthetic experience. Participatory, relational, collaborative and biopolitical methodologies now proliferate both within and beyond the white walls of the art institution while documentary modes, deployed by artists or curators, often play a pivotal role in mediating the scenarios produced. These moves into the terrains of lived experience are concomitant with what Nikos Papastergiadis has identified as the first *truly* global movement in art, which, precipitated as the economies of cultural circulation replicate the globalised movement of capital and labour, responds to incessant demands for communication, information and knowledge production (Papastergiadis 2011, 276). If, then, art's latest re-emergence as a social practice demands hyper-local face-to-face encounters, it also remains enmeshed within, and constituted through, broader socio-economic realities. While this volume proposes that these transformations have been underpinned by the emergence of an economic subject, there are of course other decisive features which attend – not least art's apparent endowment with a renewed and expanded ethical significance. Here I intend to look at how indeed the 'encounter' is constituted: what actually finds its way into contemporary art's address to real life? And, why is this address persistently theorised in terms of ethics? What does the invocation of ethics bring into, or conversely occlude from, view?

Ethical delirium

There can be little doubt that ethics has risen to new levels of prominence at the outset of the twenty-first century. Ethics committees proliferate across our institutions while ethical issues dominate both the media and political arenas. The term has also been resuscitated within academic discourse where a resurgent interest in relational ethics, from Emmanuel Levinas's work on alterity to the more recent development of an ethics of care, has been matched by a particularly vociferous set of positions which warn of the threat posed by the triumph of ethics in the wake of postmodernism.¹ Here, ethics is frequently equated with the emphatic emergence of a globalised liberalism after the end of the Cold War. In the words of Chantal Mouffe, this 'moralisation of society is [...] a consequence of the lack of any credible political alternative to the current dominance of neoliberalism' (Mouffe 2000, 86). Similarly, Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, written in 1993, is an attack levelled against the contemporary 'ethical delirium' based on the de-politicising ideology of human rights. Dedicated to the preservation of the *status quo*, this defensive brand of ethics is intimately linked with both the logic of capital and the perceived impotence of parliamentary democracy. On the one hand, this correlation engineers an apathetic form of public consensus around the *spectacle* of the economy while, on the other, it blocks the possibility of active, emancipatory politics. In short, for Badiou, ethics amounts to 'a genuine nihilism, a threatening denial of thought as such' (Badiou 2001, 3). What Mouffe and Badiou point to is a connection between the assumed completion of capitalist globalisation and a privileging of an ethical value system well suited to the 'end of history' (as argued most famously by Francis Fukuyama 1992), based around, or at least implying, notions of consensus and natural rights.

It should come as little surprise that contemporary art has participated in this revival. While the production, dissemination and consumption of images have historically dominated debates around ethics and aesthetics (indicatively, see Costello and Willsdon 2008), artists' engagements within the social realm have brought a new, more urgent, focus. Given that ethical discourse is principally concerned with ways of dwelling, or forms of being in the world, and – importantly for this discussion – *being with* others, this is understandable. Yet the discussions to date have often

1 For an interdisciplinary examination of the ethical turn, see Garber, Hanssen and Walkowitz 2000.

placed a narrow emphasis upon the ethical valance of artworks, producing a prolonged shock-versus-salve critical impasse.² Both polarities can of course be easily incorporated into capitalist economic imperatives and it is with this point that examinations of the connections between ethics debates and economic relations in art tend to stop. My aim in this chapter is to show that, in the present phase of capitalism, just as art *reveals* the economy to be a suppressed matrix of human relations, the debates and discourses surrounding art's potential as political praxis today are effectively displaced into the territories of ethics. At the same time, the complex artistic practices under discussion serve to show how this primacy of ethics is *reproduced and reinforced* by the contemporary artwork. My observations are not intended to negate ethics as a discrete field of enquiry but instead call for a more integrated account of how discourses on ethics are subject to historical processes that necessarily entail an economic dimension – a dimension that becomes critically manifest under pressure from neoliberalism. It is to be hoped that the same observations also help to bring forth the political contradiction at the heart of radical artistic practice today: is critique compatible with the reproduction of the relations being critiqued?

Care: in or out of the economy?

The demand for a theoretical framework better suited to the interrogation of socially minded art practices has led some critics to touch upon relational ethics: that is, enquiries which view the basis of ethics as a relation (or response) to a particular other. Grant Kester's work has been highly prominent in this field. Foregrounding the corporeal and discursive dimensions of collaborative cultural production, his analysis deals with 'dialogic projects' that unfold beyond the usual confines of the art institution. Deriving his concept from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's model of dialogical experience, Kester also calls upon Levinas's 'face-to-face' encounter and Jurgen Habermas's discourse theory to flesh out an analytical system grounded in concrete (rather than abstracted) intersubjective – or 'discursive' – ethics. Within Kester's schema, communicative interaction is integral to the formation of subjectivity and the possibility of transformative action. Conversation

2 More recently, attempts have been made to consider afresh the relationship between art and ethics. Situated in the light of Badiou's critique, one example is Möntmann 2013.

is positioned at the heart of his account of dialogical aesthetics which calls for an alternative skill set defined by the artist's ability 'to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis' (Kester 2004, 118). Though he mentions forms of reciprocal exchange which do not prioritise speech acts (specifically listening and gesture), Kester's focus on dialogue ultimately limits his ability fully to articulate and address the affective components that play such a crucial role in artistic practices performed within the social interstice. One way to address this gap would be to expand into the relatively recent discussions around the dynamics of care.

Associated primarily with feminist approaches, care ethics similarly proceeds from a point of particular interpersonal relations rather than the deployment of impartial and universalised rules or principles.³ Characteristics of attentiveness, openness, directedness and empathetic responsiveness continue to be privileged while the development of emotional sensitivity together with feelings (specifically those that have been educated and reflected upon) are considered crucial in terms of ascertaining what morality recommends in a given situation (Held 2006, 10). The insistence upon mutual interdependence not only prioritises the cooperative well-being of all those involved in the relation; it also carries with it a critique of liberal individualism. The predication of 'care' on unequal power relations may account, at least in part, for Kester's hesitancy.⁴ Such relations may refer to the bond between a mother and child, care-giver and patient or, beyond the immediate personal context, between citizens of wealthy societies and 'persons who are suffering deprivation in distant parts of the globe' (157). Arguing against moralising 'paternalistic' approaches, Kester cites an array of projects in which he claims artists have worked with 'politically coherent communities' (Kester 2004, 151) to build creative frameworks for mutual learning and support. Yet the same examples address particular needs within *communities marked by precarity*: migrant workers, rural communities hit by financial

3 Virginia Held locates the beginnings of care ethics discourse with the essay 'Maternal Thinking' by philosopher Sarah Ruddick 1980 and observes that the quantity of published material on the subject expanded dramatically after 1990 (Held 2006, 26 and 28).

4 In *Conversation Pieces* Kester (2004) is at pains to contrast the reciprocity of dialogic practices with a style of community art which he likens to Victorian-era social work, engaged not only in the alleviation of the effects of poverty but also in reform – more specifically, the moral regeneration of the poor.

crises and victims of domestic abuse. Furthermore, by their very nature care relations shift and change over (a life) time: they go beyond 'saintly' gestures and require 'a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actors' situations, needs and competencies' (Tronto 1993, 136). In short, the ethics of care offers a highly productive grounding for the kind of practices Kester champions. Recognising this identifies and illuminates hitherto under-analysed aspects of social art practices, and allows for a more incisive critique to be drawn.

The occlusion of the substantive emotional, psychological, somatic and care- (even love-) orientated facets of the contemporary artwork is not, however, restricted to Kester's accounts.⁵ From Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002) through Miwon Kwon's 'discursive site' (Kwon 1997) to Alfredo Cramerotti's 'aesthetic journalism' (Cramerotti 2009), the focus has been squarely placed upon communication, negotiation, information and knowledge production. In the field of philosophy, the hostility encountered by advocates of the ethics of care has been attributed to its perceived 'soft' and gendered associations with the private sphere, neediness and sentimentality. At the same time, care has typically been excluded from theorisations of the formal economy. What forms, then, do care relations take in the encounters produced through the contemporary artwork? Focusing on two practices the analysis that follows considers how these relations can be grasped and theorised.

Addressing needs: care and the division of labour in two art practices

WochenKlausur's project *Participatory Economics* (2013) exposed many of the hazards artists face when working on the political terrain in an era when the latter becomes a battleground centred on economic privilege and economic deprivation. Yet the challenges facing critics who seek to address socially engaged practices are considerable, particularly as only parts of durational artworks are accessible to non-participants, that is, to those who are not intended to be directly involved in the production of the artwork. Accounts are usually based on public-facing elements such as events and narrative documentation, or via the reflections of artists and participants gleaned through reports or interviews conducted

5 A critical account of artistic engagements with the concepts and practices of care since the 1960s remains to be written. On the pitfalls of this, see Reckitt 2013.

after-the-fact.⁶ Commissioned as part of the ECONOMY exhibition, *Participatory Economics* was an opportunity to gain greater insight into the processes involved, though, even as one of the curators, my experiences inevitably remain fragmentary and develop as the work of art, literally, continues to shape over time.

Orientated around an intensive four-week residency based in the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in February 2013, WochenKlausur's initial proposal was developed following preliminary discussions and research, then further honed in the summer of 2012 after a brief site visit. In line with their usual approach, two artists representing the Austrian collective travelled to Scotland and met with key 'stakeholders' as part of a tour organised and facilitated by the curators. Their resulting plan built around the concerns of the CCA as the host institution and their existing connections with Drumchapel L.I.F.E., a grassroots organisation operating in an area of the city with high deprivation levels and led by a particularly dynamic Director.⁷ This tactic of enmeshing their work with local partners from the outset enabled the artists to tap into existing on-the-ground knowledge and went some way towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project. At the same time, the artists were keen to capitalise on their own 'outsider' status (and symbolic capital) by identifying a distinct set of needs and offering something additional to the local context. The ensuing proposal to 'encourage and support the formation of a worker self-managed cooperative' in Drumchapel specifically set out to engage with unemployed local women and address the nutritional issues that stem from limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables.⁸

Over the course of the month-long residency, four artists (including Alex Wilde, an invited Glasgow-based practitioner) set up what is best described as a 'caring infrastructure'; accruing knowledge on business models and legal structures, securing the support of local politicians, fundraising, building new connections between existing agencies and

6 Though documentary materials are usually the only means by which experiences of collaborative and 'socially-engaged' projects can be communicated to a wider public; in this case, WochenKlausur's project office was based at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow during the exhibition. The office was open to the public and exhibition viewers were invited to discuss the development of the project with the artists.

7 See the organisation's website: www.drumchapellife.co.uk (accessed 11 October 2013).

8 Class and access to nutritious food is a long-standing issue in Glasgow. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27309446 for an outline of the notorious 'Glasgow Effect' (accessed 19 July 2014).

institutions, arranging offers for free training workshops and hands-on assistance and setting up an advisory board to provide long-term development support. Beyond the frequent brainstorming sessions and long hours of work, the relative ease with which WochenKlausur set up this infrastructure was, however, not repeated in their attempts to bring together a group of unemployed female participants willing to commit to the project. Amidst considerable challenges, a fragile circle, fluctuating from seven to three individuals, was eventually established. Working under the name 'Vegin Out', they decided to centre the new business around the sale of 'meal bags', which contain a simple recipe card together with the exact quantities of required ingredients. Recognising that the cooperative would require some time to evolve, at the end of the short residency WochenKlausur appointed the local artist as a temporary facilitator and tasked her with carrying the project through the next stage of development. At the 'concluding' public forum organised by the curators and held at CCA WochenKlausur presented their report. Yet the artists did not feel it was appropriate to invite the nascent group as it was yet to cohere and, as publicly stated, they did not want to 'make an exhibition' of the women. At the time of writing (October 2013), Vegin Out continues and is looking to a new phase operating under the aegis of the CCA's education programme. Its achievements to date include a successful pilot project realised by three local women together with the artist-facilitator, securing further development funds and the establishment of an infrastructure of individuals and organisations committed to supporting the initiative.

WochenKlausur's model of setting up relatively small-scale art projects which address concrete – and often highly urgent – needs emerged in 1992, at roughly the same time as Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses* in the USA (1993).⁹ Though Lowe's durational engagement with a particular community in Houston, Texas contrasts sharply with WochenKlausur's highly temporary catalytic interventions, they both constitute alternative models of artistic practice which were among the first to tackle *problems*

9 Working collaboratively with a group of fellow African American artists, Rick Lowe's pragmatic interventions in Houston's Third Ward responded to the effects of rapidly changing economic conditions: escalating poverty on the one hand and the juggernaut of gentrification on the other. Like *Participatory Economics*, *Project Row Houses* employs existing levers to improve the lot of individuals and highly localised communities – building affordable homes, supporting small business start-ups and developing programmes for young single mothers while integrating art and creativity into daily experience. www.projectrowhouses.org (accessed 11 October 2013).

that clearly emerged out of existent economic relations. Nearly twenty years ago, Hal Foster's identification of an 'ethnographic turn' in art took aim at artists' move into the 'expanded field of culture' which he regarded as fraught with the risk of dilettantism and based upon an appetite for cultural alterity (Foster 1996). However, in these works – and in numerous others like them – alterity opens up on an *economic* register. WochenKlausur's experiences in Drumchapel, though very specific to the context, reflected aspects of previous projects through which they have worked with communities marked by the effects of long-term unemployment. In the case of *Participatory Economics*, the artists cited the considerable challenges they faced in asking potential members to lead a cooperative enterprise based on their own ideas and interests. In the first instance, many women either thought that this was yet another activity with which they had to become involved in order to continue receiving unemployment benefits or that they were being asked to 'help out' with the artists' project. WochenKlausur's observations echoed the frustrations of Drumchapel L.I.F.E who have repeatedly argued that local residents are rarely asked to contribute their own ideas or be included in decision-making processes which affect their lives. In this sense, the 'subject' WochenKlausur tackle is none other than the one produced through disempowerment: internalised disempowerment guaranteed to crystallise as inability to proceed to even reformist (let alone, revolutionary) action. Or, in capitalist governance's parlance, as a 'lack of motivation', widely encountered 'among the poor' and seen as the real reason why they cannot 'lift themselves' out of poverty. However, WochenKlausur saw the apparent passivity they often encountered as the result not only of a deeply rooted lack of self-confidence but as part of a *survival mechanism*. Though the aim was to foster a sense of agency as well as 'realistic' employment opportunities through the establishment of a cooperative venture, in practice the artists and institutions involved have so far been required to mediate every part. The role of the institution – especially, the licence of the art institution to act experimentally – is therefore something that merits further analysis.

The 'encounter' structured around care is constituted very differently in the work of Dani Marti, which moves into the intimate private spaces of the home and bed. Mining his own relationship networks and forging new ones, Marti creates and films scenarios with homosexual men from the art world, gay scenes in his home cities and the more loose-knit communities generated by online sites like Gaydar. Encounters with each individual last anywhere between a few hours and many months

but the terms of the transaction are always clear: he offers intimacy, attention and sometimes sex in exchange for access to the inner lives of his participants. The edited documentation of these semi-constructed, yet real-life, scenarios is then displayed in the gallery. Presented as part of the ECONOMY exhibition, his work *Good Dog* (2012) offered an insight into the impact of economic relations on the formation of (sexual) subjectivity. The protagonist, Graeme, is a staff manager at a bowling alley where he has been employed since the age of 16. Ground down and emptied out, he finds release in his spare time by descending into an elaborate role-play in which he performs as a dog. The 16-minute film shows him acting out this temporary escape in the presence of the artist, capturing both his fierce need for submission and the intense self-loathing that accompanies it. Another work, *Jim Solo* (2011), depicts Marti's relationship with a vulnerable, overweight man from a town in West-central Scotland. Struggling to articulate his feelings yet desperate for physical interaction, his frustration and desire for the artist are plain. The brutal exposure of Jim's bloated, aging body is matched by a disturbing depiction of extreme emotional poverty: ashamed of his sexuality, with no support network or indeed language to express himself, Jim appears as the antithesis of the artist who offers him comfort, acceptance and sexual experience. This, now rather familiar, power dynamic between artist and subject has of course been extensively explored in the documentary genre. While Allan Sekula talked of filmmakers' predilection for 'aiming the camera downwards', Brian Winston later lambasted what he called 'the tradition of the victim' (Sekula 1978, 237 and Winston 1988). The complication that the artist's conspicuous presence poses for the direct application of such a critique here is made more apparent in *Bacon's Dog* (2011), a visceral account of the first sexual experience of Peter Fay, a 65-year-old writer, curator and art collector from Sydney, Australia. Condensing footage captured over a five-month period into an oppressive 11-minute vignette, Peter's need for touch, care and support is countered by his marked eloquence, self-awareness and social status. In this case, placed squarely within the network-driven economies of the art world, the artist is recast in a considerably less secure position as a sex therapist/worker.¹⁰

Marti's relentless focus on the corporeal, somatic points of encounter

10 *Bacon's Dog* can be read as an attempt to engage with, and ultimately manipulate, the asymmetric power relationship between the curator and the artist. Tanja Ostojić used a similar tactic in her *Strategies of Success / Curator Series* (2001–03).

(caressed skin, eager embrace, mingled breath) is matched by an attempt to capture the emotional dimensions of the experience; moments of unbound desire, pleasure, jealousy, shame and loneliness. Yet the economy of production – the transactional underpinnings of the care (or love) relations presented – are made apparent to the extent that they constitute a central theme in the work itself. Eva Illouz's research is illuminating in thinking through the incursions of market logic into the terrains of intimate life. Specifically, she introduces the concept of 'emotional capitalism' in terms of

a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing [...] a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behaviour and in which emotional life – especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange. (Illouz 2007, 5)

Aside from the insatiable demand for the public exposure of private life (to which Marti's documents patently attend), the salient consequence of this preoccupation with emotions has been the rise of a therapy culture in which such emotions' evaluation and effective management have become ever more central to both home and work life (should such a distinction be upheld). Illouz argues that the emotional competence (skills in linguistic expression together with analytic and interpretative abilities) gained through exposure to therapy culture reinforces class stratification: a well-developed emotional habitus enables contemporary subjects better to compete both in relationships and in the workplace.¹¹ In her words, 'there are now new hierarchies of emotional well-being' (Illouz 2007, 73).

The performative frame of art is brought to bear on Marti's and WochenKlausur's social experiments primarily through processes of documentation which deliver 'live' social realities into the presentation (and market) contexts of the art world. Audiences – the 'secondary public' for the art of encounter (Karlholm 2005–06) – are thereby able to witness and register the emergence of a variety of economic subjects either from the safe confines of exhibitions or through the narrative accounts

11 Illouz's research brings up to date the sociologist Norbert Elias's (1897–1990) observation in *The Civilizing Process*, published in 1939, that the longer bonds of dependency established through the formation of the state made the management of emotions central to the stability and success of societies. See Elias 2000.

offered online and in publications. Significantly, given the centrality and *visibility* of artistic labour within the reconfigured contemporary artwork and its documentation, these subjects now include the artist him/herself. The production of the lens-based or narrative document not only opens up this position for critical reflection, it also provides a grounding for (and perhaps actively invites) ethical interrogation of the social relations presented.

Care machines: alterity, affect and the art encounter

Within the field of relational ethics ‘care’ has been variously elaborated as a practice, a concept, a motive, a virtue and work. Held’s attempts to overcome the associated debates have led her to prioritise a consideration of ‘caring relations’ and the ‘practices of care’. In doing so, she frequently distinguishes work from emotion and motive, arguing that though care incorporates labour, its intrinsic relationality and basis in values (such as the commitment to meeting needs effectively) mean that it is also much more (Held 2006, 36). Her account has not kept pace with transformations in understandings of what constitutes contemporary labour, particularly in terms of the integration of production and reproduction.¹² While Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri proposed that ‘today labor and society have had to informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective’, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has convincingly argued that emotions have become a *resource*: ‘love and care have become the “new gold”’ (Hardt and Negri 2005, 109; Hochschild 2002, 26). The question that arises then, and which has seemingly radicalised a range of art practices in the past two decades, is: what are the implications for ‘care’ when capitalism has ‘married the emotional skill of being together with the dead calculus of the economy’ and become increasingly reliant upon affective labour? (Cederstrom and Fleming 2012, 37)

In recent years artistic labour has often been framed as cultural mediator of broader socio-economic conditions: Miwon Kwon established that in the late 1990s, artists’ roles and practices could be seen as part of the move towards a service- (rather than industrial production-) based economy while others have made an explicit connection between the rise of pedagogic or documentary strategies and the so-called new

12 See John Roberts’ chapter in this volume for a fuller discussion.

'informational economies' (Kwon 1997; Cramerotti 2009).¹³ The cognitive dimensions of artistic practice, together with the inherent precarity of creative work that accord with Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's observation that in contemporary capitalism life 'is conceived as a *succession* of projects', has been discussed at length elsewhere (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007, 110). Yet the demands of affective and caring labour in the production of artworks (and the careers of their makers) has, by contrast, received considerably less attention. Overall, the category of care serves to foreground the material, emotional and moral dimensions of affective labour. Though affect encompasses both the mind and body, reason and emotion, it is usually discussed in terms of cognitive labour. Operating by means of what can be described as *bouts of extreme care*, the 'art' case studies under discussion here reveal some of these demands and demonstrate the multiplicity of forms such labour can take.

Care in *Participatory Economics* was performed at a remove 'in public', through a pragmatic engagement with the local context and the administrative routes of negotiation, fundraising and networking. WochenKlausur's artistic labour is – in the main – performed in front of laptops set up in temporary offices (in this case a converted artists' studio), in the virtual spaces of the Internet or through telephone calls and meetings. If, by embedding himself within a particular community, Rick Lowe could build relationships and evolve strategies over the course of many years, the 'residency' labour model through which WochenKlausur operated for *Participatory Economics* afforded no such luxury. The accelerated pace required the near complete surrender of the life of the artists to the project over the four-week residency period. In an apparently constant state of 'active listening', they cultivated an image of openness and responsiveness, attempting to remain alert to all potential avenues of development. To forge an effective care infrastructure they had to remain responsive not only to the needs and interests of the members (or potential members) of the cooperative but to those of the social worker, healthcare provider, university lecturer, real estate agent and commissioner. Knowing that the success of the project was to a large extent dependent on their ability to generate trust and 'experimental' relationships among a broad range of constituents, they facilitated connections by employing a warm and empathetic yet

13 Note that Kwon was specifically referring to artists' provision of a 'critical-artistic' service: 'Generally speaking, the artist used to be a maker of aesthetic objects; now he/she is a facilitator, educator, coordinator, and bureaucrat'. Kwon 1997, 103.

serious disposition. Here we saw the precarious worker's availability and hyperactivity in action.

Yet the central demand placed on WochenKlausur was to be *constantly inspiring*. It is this cheer, positivity and belief (described by more than one stakeholder/participant as 'infectious') that constituted the driving force as the artists sought to will the project into being. And, indeed, as transient outsiders, they must offer something different, something more than that which is already in play. In the absence of time, energy was yoked to a moral purpose in a way that tapped into local stakeholders' ambitions to effect a concrete improvement in circumstances. The desire for the project to work and be 'successful' was (and remains) remarkably strong among those involved in the caring infrastructure.

WochenKlausur's diplomacy and altruism contrasts sharply with the ambiguities that surround Marti's motivations, as inferred from the filmed chronicles of alienation and fulfilment he carefully prepares for the audiences of art institutions. The artist's knowledge of the contexts where these chronicles become public is a salient factor in the process of the artwork's production. The oscillation between sensitivity and opportunism – even cynicism – is left unresolved by the recorded extract which does *not* elaborate on the artist's broader relationship with his participants. Questions regarding whether harm was caused in the process of production or if genuine and even enduring bonds developed remain purposefully unanswered. What is clear is that Marti's personal charm (what is referred to as 'personality') plays an important part in facilitating the encounters, enabling him to set up a form of therapeutic relationship, which passes beyond accepted norms, and elicits confessional storytelling. Though sexual encounters hardly constitute unfamiliar territory for contemporary art, the level of *emotional* promiscuity required on Marti's part is discomfiting. After all, while Andrea Fraser's sexual liaison with a collector was, according to the record of her artwork *Untitled* (2003), a one-night stand, Marti must provide something more akin to the durational intimacy of the 'girlfriend experience' offered by sex workers who exceed the parameters of traditional prostitution.

Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos's conception of 'embodied capitalism' offered in this volume is useful when considering Marti's labour. While recognising that the whole of the worker's life has the potential to produce value, the regime of embodied capitalism operates by dissolving and recombining the working subject, selecting and appropriating only parts of the subjectivities required: 'The individual

only looks like an individual in its apparent bodily shape, but in reality it becomes a genetic source, an automated client, a host to a virus, a set of competencies, a self-creating assemblage of skills, a register and a code, a body capable of extreme mobility'. Marti's labour in the 'personality marketplaces' of Internet dating and the art world demand a high degree of careful and protracted self-marketing, self-cultivation and persuasive skills in order to set up repeatedly productive scenarios. Though the films document concrete interactions between two individuals, when we see him step in to comfort Graeme (or, in other works, gently to question his subjects, touch them or become aroused), Marti himself is oddly peripheral. He remains muted to the extent that that his own identity appears to have been hollowed out in order to arrive at a condition of pure responsiveness that spurs his informants to expand into the gap he leaves. In short, this is artistic labour that requires, and relies upon, the consistent re-production of a highly specific artist-subject. Furthermore, the *type* of subjectivity demanded – a 'good listener', a self-effacing, sexy and yet compassionate and supportive individual – clearly does not square with conventional gender roles. But, as analyses of what 'feminisation of labour' might describe in contemporary art are conspicuously lacking, it is hard to place Marti's work, and subject, of care into a historically specific production context of demonstrable, recognisable characteristics.

The respective practices of WochenKlausur and Dani Marti reveal how differently care can be calibrated under the conditions of post-Fordism: the name given to a capitalist economy liberated from the old, redundant order of the strict production line. Referring to the common distinction made between those who 'care about' and 'take care of' issues or people and the hands-on activity of care-giving, Joan Tronto argues that it is gendered, raced and classed (Tronto 1993, 115). In the examples drawn from the art world considered in this chapter, however, the role of *public* 'fixer' is occupied by a group of women while the *private*, intensely physical caring-giving is performed by a homosexual man.¹⁴ In both cases, care and love are not only seen to be produced but also to *be productive*. Never mind the *flâneries* of what Hal Foster mockingly called the 'empathetic intellectual' (Foster 1996, 180), the level and

14 The delivery of a project by an all-female group was an unusual situation for WochenKlausur. The collective was originally founded by Wolfgang Ziggel and there are five men and four women in the core team.

intensity of affective labour required within such project cycles often renders the artist wrung out, anxiety-laden and emotionally exhausted.

The 'order of love': a capitalist affair?

Are these works, then, closer to an ethics of care or an economy of service? Hochschild's analysis of an altogether different order of experiences – those of female migrant labourers – underlines the complexity of this question, and renders visible a 'global capitalist order of love'. Provocatively framing love as a resource which is extracted from the poorer regions of the globe to address a 'care deficit' in wealthy countries, she describes the processes by which the love offered by nannies has been displaced and then partly produced or assembled in the rich North. She quotes a Filipina woman who cares for the baby of a professional couple in California: 'I love Ana more than my own two children. Yes, more! It's strange I know. But I have time to be with her. I'm paid. I am lonely here. I work ten hours a day, with one day off. I don't know any neighbors on the block. And so this child gives me what I need' (Hochschild 2002, 24). The love professed here – which involves providing a service, the development of affective bonds and a thoroughgoing commitment to the child's well-being – is both absolutely integral to her care labour *and* an excess. The nanny's account exemplifies the inherent difficulties in seeking to distinguish between care labour, caring attitudes and the production of moral values. As an 'active emotional labourer', she shows that when care is part of capitalist production, the personality is not merely sold or put to work. Rather, this labour of intensive emotional self-management becomes a process of *subjectification* (Hochschild 2012).

The issue of payment, or value attached to labour, further complicates matters. These are not 'elite' artists whose name and marketing finesse allow them to command the market: all but one of the WochenKlausur team subsidise their involvement with the collective through second jobs (one is employed to run their office in Vienna) while Marti finances his video production through a patchwork of commissions, residencies and other precarious income streams.¹⁵ That the artists' means of subsistence is *not* obviously apparent cannot only be put down to the continuing necessity to maintain – at the very least a convincing veneer of

15 For a discussion of female art and curatorial collectives being forced to distinguish between income-generating and 'creative', yet unpaid, work, see Dimitrakaki 2013, ch. 6.

– unconditional passionate absorption in the work of creative production (particularly when switching from project to project). The perception that WochenKlausur were not operating within the conventional wage-labour format was in many senses valuable in terms of the production of the artwork itself: they were not seen as working for a salary but because they cared. The framework of a ‘practice’ (as opposed to a job) not only gives them additional space to manoeuvre it also enables them to connect their work more conspicuously to the ethic of care that plays such a vital role in terms of the ‘motivating excess’ they offer. In Marti’s case, the ambiguity underpinning his engagements moves the question on from prostitution or exploitation to the complexities of outsourced intimacy and commercialised feelings. He offers a type of care that many would find unpalatable, even repellent, but that the recipient cannot access by other means.

In fact, ‘payment’ for both WochenKlausur and Marti takes a suitably indirect and affective form within the complex web of twenty-first-century artistic patronage: increased recognition within the art world which offers the possibility of securing the new working opportunities that ultimately sustain a practice.¹⁶ This dependence on invitations (and the submission of numerous funding applications on the part of the institution) to realise new projects underlines that an address to the art world underpins – indeed *must* underpin – the production of art in the social realm.

Care ethics in art: for whom? and what for?

The above suggest that we need to review the question of the ‘encounter’ in contemporary art as a platform for intriguing ethical entanglements. Indeed, we need to think carefully about its poles: who is drawn into its orbit and what are the processes of implication? Only then can we proceed to negotiating the meaning of the encounter. For, contrary to what ethics discourses in art tend to tell us about the primacy of the engagement between artist and participant, I want to suggest that the old-fashioned ‘spectator’, rather than the trendier ‘participant’, is ultimately addressed when a narrative of care is stitched together, performed and pictured by means of the document. Boris Groys has argued that in the biopolitical

¹⁶ Marti has acknowledged that his engagement with Peter Fey in *Bacon’s Dog* dramatically increased awareness of his work within the Australian art scene (email conversation with the author, 11 October 2013).

age a dependency on the narrative document is the indispensable flip side of art's urge to become life itself:

Today's consumer of art prefers art to be brought – delivered. Such a consumer does not want to go off, travel to another place, be placed in another context in order to experience the original as original. Rather, he or she wants the original to come to him or her – as in fact it does but only as a copy. (Groys 2008, 63)

The artist, then, is tasked with, first, intervening in and shaping lives, then producing abridged versions of their encounters through texts and images. The examples cited here demonstrate the range of formulations currently in play. While Marti's video documents attempt to deliver a taste of the somatic experience of his carefully constructed scenarios, WochenKlausur present brief written 'reports' accompanied by snapshots of quotidian scenes on their website archive and, at the invitation of curators, on posters ready for exhibition.¹⁷ Yet, though Groys offers an incisive account of the new viewership dynamics at the heart of biopolitical art, he does not elaborate on the conspicuous appetite among curators and consumers for these condensed accounts of durational lived experience. Or, more specifically, for engaging summations of particular types of intersubjective experience – such as those orientated around caring relations and care labour.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's approach to contemporary alienation focuses on the experiences of the 'cognitariat', describing the impact of a prevalent mediatisation whereby anguish and frustration stem from 'the social, linguistic, psychic, emotional impossibility of touching the thing, of having a body, of enjoying the presence of the other as tangible and physical extension' (Berardi 2009, 109). It is under these circumstances – Bifo's 'paralysis of empathy', Hochschild's 'care deficit' – that the art document has presented visions of proximity, care and action. Of course, in doing so, it simultaneously addresses the lack *and* reinforces it: the encounter is performed by others, their bodies remain remote. Moreover, as the cases analysed here illustrate, these documents affirm that caring attitudes and values can be generated within and even *through* capitalist relations. In art as in other areas of life, then, the capacity of care to generate new and unpredictable bonds can make the current economic order appear viable and acceptable. And we have to consider to what extent art is inadvertently participating in the valorisation of such an

17 See the collective's website: www.wochenklausur.at (accessed 11 September 2014).

acceptance. After all, returning to Hochschild's migrant informant, why should we oppose a nanny's emotional attachment to children she has not given birth to or, for that matter, a man willingly offering another much longed for physical intimacy? As observers, when presented with such scenarios, any unease we feel implicitly identifies us with a tired morality, a remainder of a past organisation of life, out of step with an era when the commercialisation of feeling is renewing the very meaning of love and human bond. In the new emotional economy care and intimacy are outsourced to (among others) artists. Apparently, it is up to us, as spectators, to appreciate and embrace the prospects when, as famously put by Marx and Engels (1848), 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned', once more.

The Long Working Hours of Normal Love

Renate Lorenz¹

When Pauline Boudry and I stumbled upon the extensive diaries, photographic stagings and small notes of Victorian housemaid Hannah Cullwick in the archive of Trinity College, Cambridge, we had already been researching the connections between labour, gender and sexuality for a couple of years. Our initial question had been to find out why and how we are entangled in power processes in the field of labour, or, more concretely, why we feel interpellated by the order to ‘work well’ in a way that goes far beyond the need to earn money. Already, in 1999, we had introduced the term ‘sexual labour’ – a term intended to bring together concepts of a performative, repeated production of gender and sexuality along with post-Marxist and sociological concepts of work and precarity. Our first formulation was that sexual labour is ‘doubly productive’, as it produces embodied, gendered and sexual subjectivity and products at the same time (Boudry, Kuster and Lorenz 1999). This definition had proved to be a useful entry point into a queer-feminist perspective on power processes in the field of labour, but it raised a number of new questions as well. This model could not explain why the subjects produced by sexual labour differ so widely from each other. While ‘man’ and ‘woman’ became reworked and replaced with more complex gendered practices, especially in queer subcultural scenes, the field of labour continued to

1 This chapter draws on the argument presented in my book *Aufwändige Durchquerungen : Subjektivität als sexuelle Arbeit* (Lorenz 2009). It is a revised version of my 1997 article ‘Long Working Hours of Normal Love’ (Lorenz 2007).

be based on gender binarism, but not in the same rigid way that it was so resolutely opposed by the 1970s women's movement. Moreover, the model of a double productiveness did not allow certain contradictions to be addressed – someone might 'work *well*' in one instance but, at the same time, quite badly from another perspective – nor did it allow for agency of subjects that might work against or underneath norms, perhaps even without their knowledge. Therefore, the initial question became more focused: how is it possible to counter the dichotomies of 'man–woman' or 'female–male' with a more differentiated and queering analysis, one which deconstructs and de-normalises these dichotomies but without losing the potential to criticise hierarchies, humiliation, devaluation and the unequal distribution of resources? How might it be possible to develop a complex model of power in the field of labour, one which analyses subjects as gendered and sexual but without the secure foundation of stable categories?

A picture puzzle

One of the photographs that Pauline and I found in the archive of Trinity College shows the 'maid of all work' Hannah Cullwick on the steps of a doorway that obviously opens directly onto the street or to a pathway. The spectator finds himself or herself as if he or she were a visitor to the house, before a large, black lacquered door, in front of which Cullwick is kneeling 'on all fours'. The spectator's gaze is directed from behind her onto Cullwick's back, but she is turned toward the spectator, looking directly at the camera. Next to her, on the right on the lower step, is a wooden bucket, and part of the steps appears to be wet. Cullwick was photographed, or so it seems, at her daily work, in the middle of cleaning the steps. She is wearing a light-coloured dress with a dark apron and a white bonnet on her dark hair. Even her appearance and her dress support the perception that this is a case of a woman and 'maid of all work'. On the back of the photograph is a note from her bourgeois lover, Arthur Munby: 'Hannah cleaning the doorsteps of her mistress's house as she does almost daily, taken in the street and at her own desire on Friday, 2. of February, 1872'. It was not at all common among servants of the Victorian period to arrange for themselves to be photographed while doing dirty work. Letting oneself be photographed in the pose of a type of work which is barely recognised socially – as Cullwick did – can be understood as a step towards subjugating oneself to an embodiment as 'a maid-of-all-work', and at the same time towards attaining subject

status through this subjugation. The posing demands perception and recognition of this work (Silverman 1996). A subjectivising power is then ascribed to photography: 'When a real camera is trained upon us, we feel ourselves subjectively constituted, as if the resulting photograph could somehow determine "who we are"' (135).

But what happens when we learn from the diaries that Hannah Cullwick staged this photograph in the context of a sexual scenario with the bourgeois lawyer Arthur Munby as part of (as most commentators maintain) a sadomasochism (SM) relationship? Cullwick described herself as Munby's slave: she wore a 'slave band' on her wrist that she never removed, and a chain around her neck, for which Munby had the key. She called him 'massa', an appellation that, like 'slave', referred to the reality of England as a colonial and imperialist power. In the photograph, a black band is clearly visible on her right wrist, obviously the 'slave band'. It is located in the centre of the image but is not capable of disturbing the thoroughly convincing representation of a 'maid of all work'. Interestingly, the SM scenario in which both of them participated was that of Hannah Cullwick's wage work. The work that she did in households was, as it were, doubled: she carried out the work that her employer assigned to her and for which she earned her wages. But, at the same time, she made thorough reports to Munby about this work; she made precise drawings in her diaries, which he read, and he went by the houses of her employers at agreed times to see how she cleaned. In the photograph, the spectator takes up the position of Munby, who casts his gaze on Cullwick, who in turn presents herself in a subordinate 'pose' a member of the working class. Cullwick looks directly at the spectator, a gaze that signals complicity and which contradicts the indicated subordination. The image that is perceived here is indeed 'at first sight' identical with a social-historical image of women's work; at the same time, the image belongs to a different archive, that of sexual fantasies, an archive that was initially kept secret and was only viewed by Munby and Cullwick. Only since the publication and exhibition of the diaries, letters and photographs in the 1970s has it been possible for the informed spectator to witness the sexual fantasies of Cullwick and Munby. Only now can their place in a social-historical archive of women's work be contested on a collective level as well. From the perspective of queer theoretical production or of sexual subcultures it is possible today to view the photographs in connection to SM scenarios, to their representation of non-heteronormative sexuality, or to their meaning for the subjectivity and agency of the woman worker and the heterosexual woman.

I would like to trace where and how specific connections between sexuality and labour allowed Hannah Cullwick to work against hierarchies and normality in both her working conditions and her heterosexual relationship. I do not in any way consider the power of sexuality to be 'subversive' in principle, for it plays, or so I would maintain, an important role in the 'voluntary' assumption of disadvantageous working conditions. Nevertheless, I would claim that Cullwick's posing allows for a kind of queering agency, precisely because it mimetically copies the image of the domestic servant. Cullwick managed to engage a photographer who recorded a pose in which both are visible. On the one hand, she took up a pose that referred – in a 'good enough' way (Silverman 1996, 220) – to the socially prescribed repertoire of the possible poses of a domestic servant, and in doing so she occupied the socially prescribed place. On the other hand, she placed references within the image, such as the slave band in the centre, and she staged the direct gaze into the camera. The photograph becomes a kind of picture puzzle, which allows for the subject to be recognised as much as it appears to indicate a self-authoring in the fields of sexuality and work. In this way, Hannah Cullwick represented social practices that double the image of the domestic servant, but that also 'disrupt' or 'queer' it. Photography can be understood as a de-normalisation and de-hierarchisation of her social position (Engel 2002), since it presents a sexuality that goes outside class and marriage and at the same time turns the working context and the extremely regulated working conditions of Victorian households into the showplace of this sexuality.

If we follow Kaja Silverman's claim that photography has a subjectivising effect, what would the consequences be of Hannah Cullwick's 'queering' of the image of the domestic servant? Did she actually achieve the coup of reworking her sexual relations and her working relations in everyday life? Or did the subjectivising effect of her visual production butt up against the material conditions (including the effects that constituted her as subject) that she found in her everyday work and relationships? I would like to look into the power constellation that Hannah Cullwick's queering practices both allowed and limited, forcing a new kind of work from her that, possibly, remains new in this historical moment.

Woman worker, masculine

Hannah Cullwick, the protagonist of this scene, worked as a domestic servant in Victorian London from the 1850s to the 1870s. In each of her

households she had very hard working conditions: a working period that lasted from early in the morning to late in the evening, without precise regulation, and which included very difficult physical labour, during which she, for instance, had to carry large tubs of water or suitcases, clean huge pots, or scrub laundry or shoes, soiled by the horse dung on the streets. Her diaries represent a singular historical witness of the work of a domestic servant. Hannah Cullwick also *embodied* this hard work: she was very proud of her strength and ‘masculinity’, she paid a great deal of attention to her muscles and her dirty, big, red hands. This embodiment of gender was, quite obviously, directly connected with her work practices: paradoxically, it was her hard physical labour in the household – work that ‘women’ did – that not only produced cleanliness but also masculinity.

The doubling

The work that Cullwick carried out as a domestic servant was restaged by her together with Munby in their meetings in his home: she cleaned for him, washed his feet, brushed his shoes or licked them clean. ‘After we ’d petted a bit, Massa asked me if I should like my face blacked & I said yes, so I got the black lead & oil out and I knelt twixt his knees & he brushed my face all over with it until I was a negress like I was the first time in the little room where I lodged & Massa came to see me. I blacked the grate & brushed & cleaned round the chimney piece. Washed the window sill [...] washed Massa’s feet & rubbed ’em and then I washed the black off me & wiped me’ (Atkinson 2003, 183). Sometimes she described the scenes that had taken place between her and her employer – the lady of the house – in great detail, and then they re-enacted them. Munby took over the role of the bourgeois lady.

Concerning personal relationships in marriage and family, Michel Foucault argued that in the nineteenth century a shift occurred from the so-called deployment of alliance to that of sexuality. For Foucault, deployment refers to a heterogeneous ensemble – for instance, made out of discourses, institutions, laws or academic pronouncements – which at a certain time produces a particular, strategic arrangement of power. While the deployment of alliance was characterised by careful and close ties in marriage to origin and class and to the passing on of inheritance in a pre-set course, the deployment of sexuality, as Foucault noted, is an arrangement of power in which feelings, biographies, love and sexuality come into play. In the deployment of sexuality, one decides

for, or against, a partner according to love, one reflects on this love, one weighs out problems and seeks out specialists who can advise one (Foucault 1976). Cullwick's material indicates that such a shift also occurs in the area of work: the domestic servant, who is in a fixed social position and performs specific activities for her wages, here becomes a domestic servant who reflects on how she likes this work, which of her chores she likes doing best, how she herself, her body and her strength, are formed through this work, and who is glad to be able to clean more boots. For Cullwick conducted a yearly balance with Munby in which all the cleaned shoes were precisely recorded. Hannah Cullwick worked as much as she could; she enjoyed it when she found a position 'without restraint, working as hard as I like':

when my cousin [...] call'd to see me in the afternoon [...] I was giving Missi's bedroom grate the last polish, & my face was dripping with sweat & my hands & arms was so black Elitz said, 'Hannah, why do you work so hard?' I said, 'Well, I wouldn't do it again, but you see I promised to clean the house down afore the Missis went & I would be good as my word'. But she reminded me that I was doing too much, & thought I was wrong for working myself to death to please a Missis. I said how I did it really to please myself – for I knew the Missis'd never know one half o' the dirt I'd clean'd away nor that labour it'd took to make things straight as they was. (Stanley 1984, 91)

This representation seems to anticipate the common characterisation of neoliberal labour relations, according to which we do the work demanded of us 'on our own orders' and with our own pleasure, thereby working more and better than demanded. One could also think that the increasing importance of the deployment of sexuality in the field of work has led us to 'love' work and to work more without compulsion or additional incentive. At any rate, Hannah Cullwick not only cleaned rooms and objects on orders from her employer, she also secretly cleaned in places that went well beyond her area of duty. For instance, she would wait for the hours when she was alone in the house, and then she would take off her clothes and creep into the chimney to clean it. When she came back out, she was covered with soot from head to toe. Afterwards she would report to Munby about this dirty work. Clearly, sexuality is here deployed as a medium that permits the reproduction of powerful norms in the field of work. On the other hand, however, as Judith Butler has formulated, no regulating power is in position to determine sexuality completely: 'Rather, it [sexuality] is characterised by displacement, it

can exceed regulation, take on new forms in response to regulation, even turn it around and make it sexy' (Butler 2004, 15). Following this, sexuality could be described, borrowing another formulation from Butler, as a practice of a possibility and duty to improvise within a scene of constraint (i). Or else, Hannah Cullwick accomplished 'sexual labour'.

Sexual labour

The term 'sexual labour' should make it possible to connect Hannah Cullwick's work and position as a domestic servant, her position as a woman and her masculinity with sexuality as a medium in this process. It therefore speaks to the practices that repeat and rehearse heterosexuality and gender along existing norms, as well as to the practices of reworking them. While Luis Althusser's term 'savoir-faire' (1967) – referring to competences/skills that we acquire and that enable us to act but at the same time also achieve social existence – shows how subjects always reproduce the practices of a society in the same way and take up the places offered, the term 'sexual labour' brings in the possibility that the designated places and the practices connected with them can, and will, be reworked. As such, 'sexual labour' allows Hannah Cullwick's masculinity, or her particular way of cleaning, to connect with a model of the social and with a particular arrangement of power. How does sexual labour function as a set of practices between the individual and society?

The fantasy of changing

Teresa De Lauretis offers a model that connects subjects to the social through sexuality with her particular use of the term 'fantasy' (1994). De Lauretis distances herself from the psychoanalytic concept of an individual psyche or medical history and proposes instead an idea of a social subject whose subjectivity and psychic structure can be deduced from social technologies, representational systems and practices. Elements of the social, scenes experienced, images, laws and myths are included in the subject's fantasy scenarios: in Hannah Cullwick's case these were representations of work or collective images from the recent past of slavery. These public images are connected with individual images and ideas that at the same time are equally 'social', in that they come from the history of experiences, embodiments and interpellations, such as Cullwick's obsession with fashioning her own body as 'masculine' or her

experiences with her employer. The fantasy is 'the psychic mechanism that governs the translation of social representations into subjectivity and self-representation, and thus the adaptation or reworking of public fantasies in private fantasies' (De Lauretis 1994, 285).

De Lauretis's observations show how the material, the scenes and the power differences of the everyday work world, as well as the history of work, can become determinate for the psychic reality of the subject, for his or her desire and sexuality, for the constitution of a sexual, gendered, raced and desiring body-ego. The fantasy is then a corresponding social reality, which is initiated and formed through sexual labour and which at the same time makes sexual labour possible in the first place. The fantasy produces the images, scenes and syntax of sexual labour from the pool of the social. For De Lauretis, the concept of fantasy is predominantly a model for social change: collective and public fantasies can be reworked, not only in their contents but also structurally, as De Lauretis points out. Hannah Cullwick could then become a spectator to a scene in which a domestic servant takes on a socially altered position – for instance, as a domestic servant whose work is socially represented and highly valued. There could, however, also be scenes in which a domestic servant is driven to housework, cleans to the point of exhaustion, and in which this exhausting work produces desire, so that she works much more than expected. In order to be socially effective, however, these fantasies must be shared; they have to become, according to De Lauretis, collective scenarios of fantasy (De Lauretis 1994).

Shared fantasies

When Hannah Cullwick was 21 years old, she met Arthur M. Munby, a then 26-year-old lawyer who was at odds with his education and with wage-labour. Munby approached women workers who did hard, dirty and badly paid work on the street or at their place of employment, asking them to let him photograph them or to be interviewed by him. They were domestic servants, but also women who carried milk jugs and other heavy loads, women who picked up the trash. He undertook journeys to meet women who worked in the mines or in the fishing industry. Munby concentrated particularly on the attributes of masculinity. He admired the women workers' muscles; he obsessively described and depicted their rough, red hands or their powerful frames. In his documentation, Munby produced more than just a representation of each of his subjects. His admiring descriptions produced their masculinity, which, without

his gaze, without the naming, categorising and contextualisation of what he 'saw', would not have existed in the same way. At the same time, there was a self-presentation in these descriptions, for Munby liked to juxtapose the proletarian masculinity of the women with his own feminine, weaker and bourgeois corporeality, such as in a photograph in which he can be seen next to a female mine worker, or in the drawing in which he sketched himself next to a woman worker who was bigger and stronger than he was.

Cullwick's wish to see her work and working position represented and recognised, her interest in dirty work and a dirty, masculine body, came together with Munby's interest in seeing himself compared with a masculine woman worker. They jointly produced scenarios in which the work process – meaning Cullwick's skills in its double meaning of dominating and submitting, including all its elements, how hard the work was, how exhausted her body was, the dirt, the successful production of cleanliness, the humiliation by the employer, the threat – could be given new meanings. Through her detailed diaries, Cullwick gave Munby a glimpse into her work, and she was excited by his interest in her masculinity and strength. He made it possible for her to stage a 'picture puzzle' which simultaneously represented work and sexuality, to become intelligible, even if initially only in the framework of their shared fantasies.

Munby's documentary activity can, accordingly, be read as proof of how social science and empirical work is tangled up in the objectivity attributed to it, in power, desire and the playing out of the most diverse fantasies. Sexuality and sexual fantasies have, as De Lauretis has formulated, a 'semiotic-material' function (De Lauretis 1994, 298 ff.), they take over social meanings, rework them, and in this way intervene in the way interpellations work and in their contents. The allocation of a new meaning could lead, for instance, to the fact that Munby took on a feminine role in a shared fantasy scenario and Cullwick could assign a high social value to her housework, which remained for her when she did this work in the households of her employers.

Fantasy at work

As the diary shows, Hannah Cullwick occasionally even managed to get one of her employers to take part in a fantasy scenario, when she cleaned in the bedroom of her employer, Miss Knight, while she was still lying in bed: 'I thought I would show them how Massa likes me to clean a

grate & I ventured to rub the bars with my bare hands, & yet I was afear'd they may think it a dirty way'. Initially, then, Hannah Cullwick wondered if her heterosexual relations and work relations would be brought together. Then, however, the scene developed as such:

But instead, the Miss Knight in bed watch'd me, & spoke quite pleasantly, & when she saw I wanted more wet said, 'Come here, Hannah, I'll wet your hand for you out of my bottle'. I had taken care to get my arms black & I rubb'd them across my face, & having my striped apron on & frock pinn'd up, you may guess how I look'd as I crawl'd on my knees to & from the bedside & holding my hand up for the water. (Her) been so delicate, as white as a lily & her face too, from been in bed so many years, & I suppose never soil'd her fingers ever, except perhaps with a dirty book or paper, & the white coverlet & all standing out against my dirty black hands, & my big red & black arms, & my face red too & sweating till the drops tumbled off, or stood on little drops o' crystal again the greasy black. (Stanley 1984, 66)

A scene was created here in which pleasure arose not only from reporting it to Munby, but obviously already from the interaction with the employer; Cullwick here becomes a partner in the sexual fantasies and practice. The concept of fantasy does not recognise any dichotomy between (masculine or superior) subject and (feminine or inferior) object. Fantasy is offering, in De Lauretis's formulation, 'not the object but the setting of my desire' (De Lauretis 1994, 110). The fantasy scenarios developed and their social effects made it possible for Cullwick to take on agency within sexual relations as well as work relations, even if, or precisely because, she acted from a subordinate class and gender position, and despite the fact that the scenarios were produced within labour hierarchies and oppressive working conditions (cf. McClintock 1995, 140).

Fetish

A series of visibility strategies established the connection between the fantasised scenes and everyday practice. They ensured the representation of sexual relations between Cullwick and Munby in Cullwick's work context and the representation of working relations within a sexual staging: one of these strategies was 'dirt'. In her diary, Cullwick did not describe how clean the house was; instead, she spoke of how dirty she herself got in the course of her work activities. One reason could be

that dirt was a better visual measure of the work. Cullwick's muscles and hands were also fetishised: she and Munby together measured the circumference of Cullwick's arms and the span of her hand: 'My arm is 13.¾ inches round the muscle & my hand 4.½ inches across the inside, for Massa measured them' (Stanley 1984, 127). Her size and strength were in this way allocated a measurable value, which had meaning within both her work and sexual relations. Using the term fetish, we can establish a view of this practice that forms a bridge between the areas of knowledge of work and sexuality, which have historically mostly been pursued separately. Both Marx and Freud used the term 'fetish': Marx to refer to the fetishistic quality of goods, Freud to describe a sexual practice that he presented as 'perversion'. Both took this term precisely from colonial history. Anne McClintock appropriately notes that the use of the term 'fetish' shows to what degree the fundamentals of knowledge, including the regulation of goods, money, sexuality and gender are built upon the history of imperialism. Fetishists are then the 'perverse' or the uncivilised, the superstitious, who do not, or cannot, follow 'evolutionary' progress.

They are those who not only are not counted as part of civilisation but who even pose a threat to it. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to McClintock, the discourse on fetishism became a comprehensive instrument of control, in which the regulation of sexuality, 'race', gender and economy came together (McClintock 1995, 182 ff.). It was precisely this history that led De Lauretis to a 'disidentificatory' (Muñoz 1999) usage of the term, building on Freud's approach to explain 'normal sexuality' by investigating the so-called perversions. De Lauretis understands perversions, without hesitation, as constitutive of sexuality, and the so-called 'normal' as an ideal that no one can live up to. Accordingly, she uses the term 'fetish' to rework the history of the regulation of sexuality and views it as an important sign of that sexuality that is 'non-normatively heterosexual' (De Lauretis 1994, xiii). I would classify this view of the fetish as a political project, which takes on, and appropriates, the 'fantasies' of colonial history and 'wrongly understands', so to speak, the normalising regulation of goods, money, sexuality and gender.

On this basis, the work and sexual practices of Cullwick and Munby, which focus on a series of specific objects, can be understood as a 'politics of the fetish'. Their fetishes were chosen so that they always referred, 'at first glance', to sexuality/gendering as well as to labour. For example, muscles and dirt can give rise to ideas of feminine masculinity as well

as to labour; the slave band refers both to the sexual relationship of dominance and submission as well as to labour; the hands could stand for sexual touching as well as for manual labour. It is a question of the objects that are in position to transfer meaning from the field of sex to that of labour or vice versa, and in this way to renegotiate the various economies in both fields. Dirt, for example, was heavily laden with social meaning within the conventions of Victorian society: white bourgeois identity was marked by being clean, by bearing no trace of dirty work. Dirt, on the contrary, was the sign of the working class, especially working-class masculinity, and of the people in the colonies. Precisely because of such conventions, these fetishes were appropriate for a social negotiation of meaning and value. The fetish enabled a fantasy of the sexual control of labour: counting boots, for example, became a currency that could oppose the threats of working life, the fear over the employee's recognised position, the invisibility of work, or the lack of recognition. It can also be seen as a sign of sexual subordination as well as a sign of successful cleaning work.

Great expenditure

But it was exactly the 'picture puzzle', the connection between the fields of sexuality and labour, that produced trouble as well. If one of Cullwick's employers had surprised her while she was cleaning the chimney, she would probably have been let go. And if she had appeared less dirty from work, Munby might have withdrawn his recognition. So contradictions arose between her wish to belong to those who 'work well' and her wish to belong to a successful sexual relation with Munby. Sexuality and work therefore in no way came together as one. Much more, an additional expenditure was demanded of Cullwick, since she was wrapped up in two different sets of power technologies, that of wage work and that of heterosexuality. The individual is here interpellated as a subject who 'may' and must herself work out the contradiction between various power effects in the field of labour and in the field of sexuality.

Regarding the notion of sexual labour, this observation made it important to shift attention away from the 'products' of sexual labour (the subjects) to the 'expenditure' associated with it. Isn't it exactly the expenditure, which is connected to recognition or threat, that produces an entanglement into the field of labour? One of the characteristics of sexual labour is that it systematically confronts individuals with contradictions – like that of Cullwick's belonging to wage-labour and

to a heterosexual relationship – that demand of them an expenditure of individual negotiation, although they can only be resolved socially. Everybody is interpellated to perform a certain expenditure. But the amount of expenditure, which is linked to the process of subjectification, is different for each individual. If somebody is not able or not willing to keep up with norms of heterosexuality, femininity/masculinity or whiteness, this might ask for a much more extensive amount of expenditure, based on the possibility of threats, deprivations of rights, violation or humiliation. Nevertheless, the expenditure is not distributed strictly according to dichotomous categories. This makes the theorising of ‘expenditure’ valuable for any queer perspective on labour, and enables us to criticise hierarchies and the division of labour *not according to fixed identity categories but according to the sexual labour that has to be achieved*. Power differences can thus be addressed in all their contradictions, intersectionality and graduations. According to Foucault, the expenditure demanded explodes at the moment in which the deployment of sexuality gains importance, and the individual is confronted with the possibility of ‘crossing’ social positions as well as the compulsion to do so.

Crossing

In one photograph, Hannah Cullwick can be seen in ‘class drag’, her head slightly tilted, her hands folded in front of her body. She is wearing a dress with an open neckline, short puffed sleeves and a billowing skirt, and her long hair is tied in the back and decorated with flowers. Except for two dark bands on her wrists, obviously the ‘slave bands’, this image documents the ordinary figure of a young bourgeois woman and conforms to the body, dress and behavioural norms of the Victorian period. Another photograph shows a person with short hair, shirt, tie, vest and a dark coat or jacket. Cullwick is here portrayed as a young bourgeois man. This version of cross-dressing additionally makes it possible for her tentatively to take on the role of Arthur Munby, whose clothes she wears here (Atkinson 2003).

In another photograph a young man can be made out, sitting cross-legged on the ground; his skin is dark and he is almost naked, except for a light-coloured cloth wrapped around his hips and another light-coloured cloth that he wears wrapped around his head. His chest is in the shadows of the image and is almost unrecognisable. A potential reference to femininity from the almost invisible breasts is covered by the clearly

visible muscle of his upper arms and by his nakedness. The way he holds his head and his gaze gives his stance something markedly submissive. The background is neutral, on the right edge of the image the tip of a shoe can be seen, apparently the foot of the person that he is looking at. The image, another portrait of Hannah Cullwick, seems to show a male, black slave, who, sitting on the ground, looks at his owner/master. With the 'ethnic drag' of this photograph, Cullwick puts herself not into an attractive image, but into a socially extremely devalued image, that of the 'slave', of one in bondage, that was furthermore culturally very established, but that no longer corresponded to the social reality of her time – slavery had in the meantime been outlawed in England.

With these images, Hannah Cullwick covered some of the most important social positions of her time. The images could, for my part, effortlessly 'pass' – as portraits of a bourgeois woman, a bourgeois man and a male slave – since they largely follow contemporary conventions. If the function of photography is to subjectify, are then subjects produced here that also effortlessly cross through social positions in the everyday? Or: what function does the fantasy of crossing, shown so impressively in Hannah Cullwick's staging, have for the effectiveness of power in the everyday world of wage-labour and personal relationships?

Mobility

Munby not only treasured the bodily attributes of the women workers that could be seen as 'masculine', his interest also turned to a certain ability: namely, the ability of 'mobility', not only in reference to gender but also pertaining to class. While Munby presented other women workers who at first glance appeared 'as men', who 'work like a man', or who even lived as men, Hannah Cullwick was quite obviously in the position not only to go outside the common representations of femininity but also those of class, and to appear as a 'lady of the highest'. Munby emphasised that he saw her body simultaneously as one of a hard-working farmer and as one of an intelligent lady (Atkinson 2003, 35).

While the staged photographs worked as a fetish that resolved contradictions and made it possible to transport meanings between the fields of work and sexuality, in the everyday, however, the expense connected with crossing was unequally higher. Hannah Cullwick travelled with Arthur Munby in 'class drag', wearing the clothes of a bourgeois woman and acting as his wife, since travelling together would otherwise not have been possible. When Hannah Cullwick went out to eat with

Munby as a bourgeois woman, for instance, both continually observed to what degree her passing succeeded: the masquerade demanded constant attention. 'I felt just a bit awkward [...] when my chair was put for me at the table & the waiter took the covers off & waited on us. But Massa said I behaved pretty well all through' (Atkinson 2003, 205). The interpellations of Cullwick as a 'bourgeois woman' additionally demanded that the bodily traces of the domestic servant – the strong, red hands and the strong muscles – be carefully concealed; that is, precisely the markings that enabled the recognition of her work and her position as a domestic servant. Since both interpellations made a good enough embodiment necessary, the sexual labour here 'exploded' the working out of contradictions in competing interpellations.

The situations not only offered a social promise of recognition but at the same time were bound up with a threat, should the assumption of the position not sufficiently succeed. As a domestic servant, Cullwick was threatened by the fact that her work was not represented, that she found no recognition, lost her job, or was not paid; as a bourgeois woman, she was threatened by the possibility of being 'exposed' as a domestic servant and be shut out of social situations like travelling with Munby. It can therefore be seen that the mobilisation of the positions made possible by crossing in no way suspends hierarchies: passing in an upward direction is rewarded with recognition, the 'discovery' of belonging to a lower position is formulated as a threat that entails significant social consequences. So, a possibly empowering gesture, such as Cullwick's appearances as a man or a bourgeois woman, were simultaneously figured as an 'ability' and a knowledge of how something is to be done, an ability whose possession made recognition possible and whose lack was inseparable from a threat. In October, Munby noted, after Cullwick had cleaned his house from the cellar to the roof, she said that she would rather be tired from scrubbing houses than from climbing the staircases of hotels. She was prepared to be his slave until the end of her life, but she hoped he would no longer want to take her out as a bourgeois woman again. Shortly thereafter she showed Munby a paper that said that she preferred hard work to being a bourgeois woman (Atkinson 2003, 270). A little while later, Hannah Cullwick had a breakdown, owing to the fact that she, as the biographer Diane Atkinson supposes, was overworked. Munby had asked her to travel with him over the weekend – in bourgeois drag – but she refused, since she had too much housework to do and her hands were in a bad condition. It can be seen, then, that leaving a coherent social position does, indeed, on the

one hand, carry the promise of being able to abolish the lifelong ties to the social restrictions that go along with belonging to a certain class and gender. At the same time, it is clear that there is a matter here of a new, very violent deployment of power, precisely bound to the precariousness of the positions, which draws its strength from confronting the subject with contradictory and simultaneous interpellations. This deployment demands a great expenditure of sexual labour, and exceedingly strains the ability to live.

After Hannah Cullwick's refusal to accompany him as a bourgeois woman on his trip, Munby travelled alone. Shortly after his return he noted in his diary that Hannah Cullwick was sick. This was followed by raging, hurtful fights and a break that led to Munby sending her out of his house. They did maintain contact over the next thirty years, but she lived alone in the country from then on; she was very often not well and his visits were sporadic. Such a deployment, which not only makes mobility possible and instils it with desire, but at the same time pronounces threats if it should not succeed, seems to have become lastingly lodged into the field of labour. The precariousness of the coherent positions that tie genders, gender identities, desires and work positions to each other is, at the same time, part of a new deployment of power that demands a great expenditure of sexual labour.

Occupy the Art World?

Notes on a Potential Artistic Subject

Gregory Sholette

‘Individual rights are the means of subordinating society to moral law’.

Ayn Rand

‘It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men’s heads’.

Theodor W. Adorno

‘Let us free art from the vagaries of financial speculation and privatization and restore its promise of a better world. By sharing its power to enrich all of our lives, let us make it part of our struggle to reclaim the commons’.

Arts & Labor Working Group of Occupy Wall Street

‘Does Occupy Signal the End of Contemporary Art?’ entreated an online BBC report at the height of 2012’s urban uprisings. Pointing to the abundance of populist, protest art produced by protesters the writer confidently announced that ‘it is beginning to feel like a new artistic movement’ (Mason 2012). Notwithstanding the wooden stake Occupy Wall Street (OWS) allegedly drove into the white-box heart of high art, more than one year later, Christie’s Auction House raised a record 691 million dollars in contemporary art sales. ‘It’s a new world: it feels like a reinvention of the art market. I’m overwhelmed’, one very exuberant Christie’s insider exclaimed at the time (Adam 2013). So,

which is it: dead or alive? So just whose ends and whose beginnings are we bearing witness to at the turn of the twenty-first century? Is it the inauguration of an ever-expanding commercial art world, or some still emerging post-OWS radical art subject? Or is it both simultaneously? And, more broadly speaking, as Syria's struggling resistance and Egypt's post-revolutionary uncertainty turn into an Arab winter, and as the once furious kicks emanating from economically garrotted nations such as Cyprus, Greece, Spain and Ireland are now little more than quivers, is the world slipping so soon back into its familiar banalities that theorist Mark Fisher acerbically calls 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009) because, don't you know, capitalism is too big to fail? Where now is that rebel imaginary of Occupy stirring, if it is at all, and how has this fledgling experiment prepared us for the next phase of anti-capitalist cultural resistance? For, however fantastic that may seem today, it is surely to come.

The end of art (again)

For many people 'art' still represents the epitome of non-productive, even non-social, work. It is the kind of thing we do, or imagine we would do, if ever the monotonous routines that fill our day-to-day life were lifted, or if the burden of survival were to be suspended. In this familiar scenario the artist stands on the outer edge of the communal coil at the exact point of friction between autonomous individuality and collective social need. But how then to understand those artists who choose to make work about such worldly concerns as economic inequality, social justice, war or globalisation? Do such individuals simply fail to grasp that if art has social value this must come from its non-instrumental invocation of aesthetic experience, not from its content? And that artistic subjectivity epitomises freedom not by developing a social consciousness but by maintaining a distance from society? Here Ayn Rand's moral individuality that stands stalwart against collective banalities finds common ground with Theodor W. Adorno's cultural negation as social value, their opposite political viewpoints notwithstanding.

By today's cynical standards both Rand and Adorno's romanticisation of the aesthetic is truly utopian, that is to say it exists in *a*/*as a no place*. The actual day-to-day workings of the art industry produces a subject so ensnared by capital that even art students in the furthest states and provinces now insist on taking classes about how to market their products. Self-branding has overtaken self-discovery. Or perhaps the two

have merged into a single feedback loop? For, as artists promote their unique creative activities via social networks, this process of 'sharing' not only serves to differentiate their wares, it also reinforces a concept of artistic identity in its own right. One side of this Möbius strip is inscribed 'I brand my art', and on the same side it reads 'my brand is art'. This ontological looping is therefore quite unlike the deeply troubled artistic consciousness that either Rand or Adorno once imagined belonged exclusively to the artist. And yet by virtue of being *no place* the integrity of their aesthetic ideal manages to assert itself over and over at every turn. Of course, few would insist that being an artist was ever wholly free of self-promotional careerism. In a society organised (in principle) around utility, being an artist greatly maximises one's individual economic risk. And even if artistic salesmanship has traditionally been handled indirectly when, say, compared to other businesses models, the artist's ability to stand out in a crowd has always been a question of survival, for the person, or for the work. So, whether or not we see art today as a calling or as a profession, there is always some level of entrepreneurial skill ready at hand. If the artist does not possess this expertise, then a partner, relative or dealer most often does. Risk requires capital. This capital comes in two forms: actual financial investments and symbolic or cultural capital. No artist succeeds without access to both assets. Which may be why few highly successful artists, and even fewer art historians, have come out of working class backgrounds. Or at least that is how things have operated for quite some time. A trio of changes are upending this scenario, providing both possibilities and challenges not only for genuinely critical artistic subjects but also for the customary operations of the art world.

First comes demographics. Who gets to be an artist is changing as more and more individuals from modest economic backgrounds are graduating with professional degrees from art schools and university art programmes. Yes, most of these institutions still have professors who eschew commercial knowledge, preferring instead to recount tales of earnest, studio-bound students rocketed to stardom by a Mary Boon or Larry Gagosian. But most of these students know they must balance such anecdotes against the pressing fact that a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in the USA will add between \$30,000 and \$80,000 to one's individual debt, depending of course on the school one attends. When confronting this level of sheer existential risk, it comes as no surprise that young artists hope to succeed by commercialising their practice, even if that means nothing more than adding regular postings

to a Facebook page, although it typically involves a much greater level of self-marketing. In the ever more monetised society we have all inherited from the Regan/Thatcher revolution, each generation becomes less queasy regarding that endlessly looping Möbius strip.

The second change-factor altering the art world landscape involves participatory forms of art that are growing in popularity right alongside conventional forms of material production. Perhaps these immaterial projects are even eclipsing artistic objecthood. This of course may be a temporary phenomenon, but at this moment its effects are dramatic. Conferences, exhibitions, academic programmes and an expanding bevy of books celebrate, often with little self-criticism, the 'social turn' in art (Bishop 2006). Institutions that would never consider offering a solo exhibition to troublemakers such as Hans Haacke or Martha Rosler, or groups like Yomango or Critical Art Ensemble, now feel compelled to programme participatory and socially engaging art projects into their schedules. Though fully valorising this work may remain forever elusive, few today would assert that art has no heteronomous social worth and should instead be appreciated solely as art for art's sake.

The third force reshaping artists and artistic institutions is the rise of cognitive capital. As John Roberts points out, 'art today is subsumed under general social technique as a condition of art's increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production' (Roberts 2013a, 66). Both indebtedness and the socialisation of artistic practices described above are fully exploited by these new cognitive relations of production. And yet they nevertheless require that the contemporary art subject behave in a rebellious, even anti-social fashion, as if the ghost of Bohemia past demanded satisfaction. Though of course no matter how outlandish the artist becomes, she is never permitted entirely to disconnect from networked culture. After all, the entire project of what has been called 'capitalism 2.0' (see Haque 2011) depends upon a dispersed form of collectivisation that can rapidly be focused on problem solving or consumption or generating new ideas and then just as quickly be dispersed again without commitments or promises offered in return. Nevertheless, this field of digital dispersal, including its dark matter, bright stars and everything in between, remains fully within the logic of creative capital's paradigm. At this stage of capitalist subsumption, writes Fredric Jameson, 'the extra-economic or social no longer lies outside capital and economics but has been absorbed into it: so that being unemployed or without economic function is no longer to be expelled from capital but to remain within it' (Jameson 2014, 71).

In other words, chronically under-employed workers, such as artists, are neither peripheral to nor are they outside the system; instead they remain somehow *necessary for capital's reproduction*.

Contemporary capital's oft-noted lack of an 'outside' may also explain why even as art is subsumed within it – either by the global marketplace or these new cognitive relations of production, or both – it still manages to retain an irrepressible aura of freedom, even rebellion. To put this differently, it seems that by moving art's 'outlaw' status 'indoors', a trace of resistance continues to mark or gesture towards the very absence of a breach or loophole in capital's smooth hegemonic surface. This mark or smudge is crucial, for it allows art to claim a special ontological status that allegedly sets it apart from the market. It also makes it possible for artists, among other 'creatives', to use art to expose the system's empty promises in a process that has only accelerated during the economic restructuring following the financial meltdown. So conspicuous is this convergence of artistic aura and political activism that a BBC reporter made a checklist of Occupy's aesthetic tendencies including a preference for graphic design, typography and comic book imagery; a renewed emphasis on figuration (presumably shunning abstraction as a 1 per cent kind of thing); and, most of all, the movement's subversion of advertising aesthetics carried out in populist modes, as opposed to the way Pop Art once subverted commercial imagery within the elite white cube of the museum (Mason 2012). Thus, even in its most instrumentalised guise, art remains *ontologically bound up* with notions of freedom. And that is a good thing. At least it is good some of the time.

As Occupy unfolded, another version of the rebel imaginary was gestating in the USA on the far political Right. Members of the Tea Party Patriots began to dress up as eighteenth-century soldiers from the American Revolution in order to stage public protests against federal taxation and what they see as President Obama's creeping move towards 'socialism'. Notably, these 'rebels' remain active today, whereas the Occupy Movement does not. Even more darkly, we see the display of pseudo-Swastikas brandished by members of Golden Dawn in Greece and the intentionally archaic DIY medieval shields, weapons and barricades made of plywood, car tyres and ice constructed by both populist dissenters as well as members of the ultra-nationalist Right Sector in Kyiv Ukraine's Maidan movement during the 2014 winter. The unleashing of Maidan's repressed populism with its cacophony of sentimental, folkloric and progressive imaginary is just one of many recent examples in which a previously unseen or repressed cultural productivity is materialising as

public self-representation. Along with networked anti-capitalists, we also find once-scattered pockets of misogynist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic subcultures gaining coherency and therefore improved social agency. For better and for worse, a once-observed cultural 'dark matter' (Sholette 2010) has leapt onto the world stage. It demands our attention as well as our anxiety, respect, affection and hatred. It also raises the possibility of renewed forms of suppression. Undoubtedly, this was the fate of OWS.

The 99 per cent aesthetic: suppression and after

It is easy to forget in the aftermath of OWS's apparent failure that it was not the demonstrators near Wall Street, nor those encamped at Fond du Lac in Wisconsin, or those at Frank H. Ogawa Plaza in Oakland, or Dilworth Plaza in Philadelphia, or the other cities who voluntarily retreated from occupied spaces. Neither did protestors in the city of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, or Tahrir Square in Cairo, or Pearl Square in Bahrain, or the Puerta del Sol in Madrid simply agree to withdraw from the 'commons' that they had dared to 'repossess'. Whatever 'lack' of long-term strategy these movements must now address, one fact is certain: the immediate disintegration of a global oppositional moment was brought about first and foremost by the orange control nets and stinging pepper-spray of the NYPD's White Shirts, the rubber bullets and tear gas of Egypt's State Police, and the US-supplied armoured cars and helicopters of Bahrain's security forces among the other militarised forces mobilised to protect the global corporate system. These are not metaphors, any more than the bulldozing of Zuccotti Park on 15 November 1911 was a performance piece.

What survives of Occupy continues to digest the consequences of this suppression. And while this level of state violence appears to have driven back overt acts of cultural disobedience, they reappear again as indirect modes of everyday resistance not unlike those championed by Michel de Certeau following the failure of May 1968 (de Certeau 1984, 82). Still, the memory of Wall Street, Cairo, Madrid and other occupied city centres is still raw, just as the economic crisis that fuelled these uprisings is ongoing. In the process, something else has also been inaugurated that was already in play before these events, thanks to an ever more accessible technology for manufacturing, documenting, distributing, as well as pilfering, revamping and fictionalising information. With digital technology, a previously obscured realm of cultural productivity has found a way to brighten and gain agency as dark networks

thicken, cohere and bristle with a desire for independence, not only from prevailing market forces, but also from mainstream cultural institutions including the art world.

We might describe this shift as the sudden unblocking of what Alexander Kluge and Oscar Negt (1993) called, back in the 1970s, a counter-public sphere: the defensive production of fantasy generated in response to the alienating conditions of capitalism. Or we could refer to this process as the illumination of a previously shadowed realm of informal, everyday imagination from 'below', a phenomenon to which I referred earlier in this chapter as 'dark matter'. This visualisation not only exposes pent-up desires, it also releases less savoury forms of anger and resentment, all the while throwing a light on the actual socialised conditions of labour, which is a condition essential for *all forms of production today*, including art. And this inescapable visualisation of social production comes at a moment when the usual precariousness of artists has reached a new level of intensity.

Where did all these artists come from and what are they aware of?

As is widely known, even professional artists – that is to say those with credentials such as the BFA or MFA (in some countries now joined by the practice-based PhD) – typically work two or three non-art related jobs in the USA in order to maintain a modest level of income. On top of this is a shortage of paid work following the 2008–09 economic breakdown and cities where reasonable studio space rentals have been pushed to the far-off urban margins by gentrification. Before the financial crisis French sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger reported that poverty rates among artists in the USA were 'higher than those for all other professional and technical workers' (Menger 1999). Since 2008, this extreme precariousness among artists is less and less confined to the USA. Compounding this bleak situation is the ever-greater waves of graduating artists from schools and universities who augment an already over-saturated industry with a glut of artists described by Carol Duncan in 1984 as 'the normal condition of the art market' (Duncan 1993). Shortly before the global financial catastrophe, a 2005 *Rand Corporation* study found that:

The number of artists in the visual arts has been increasing (as it has in the other arts disciplines), and their backgrounds have become more diverse. At the same time, however, the hierarchy among artists,

always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects. At the top are the few 'superstar' artists whose work is sold internationally for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars. (Rand Corporation Summary 2005, unpaginated)

A more recent report by the privately run consulting business Arts Economics found that the art market reached €47.4 billion in total sales (fine art and antiques) in 2013 with Post War and Contemporary art forming the largest sector of these sales (Arts Economics 2014). Meanwhile, the artist's collective W.A.G.E. (Working Artists for the Greater Economy) has generated a survey in which some 577 respondents suggest that the not-for-profit sector of the art world is not exactly a fair or safe haven from the commercial art world: 'On average, the majority (58.4%) of respondents did not receive any form of payment, compensation or reimbursement for their participation, including the coverage of any expenses' (W.A.G.E. 2010, unpaginated).

Notably, W.A.G.E. – whose mission focuses on 'regulating the payment of artist fees by nonprofit arts organization' – was itself founded by a small group of artists in 2008 as the financial crisis began to unfold. Putting these pieces together underscores something that we already instinctively grasp: that the working conditions of artists are poor and getting more so, but also that precariousness is no longer unique to creative vocations. If anything, the asymmetrical, top-heavy world of art resembles a hyperbolic microcosm of the global economy in general, with winners taking all and the rest of us, well, to quote Benito Mussolini's fascist party: 'Losers beware!' (Fo 2002, unpaginated).

The fact that artists such as W.A.G.E. are turning around to examine their own labour situation is a problem for the mainstream culture industry. For several decades now, but especially since the crisis of 2008–09 we have witnessed the emergence of social labour in the art world as an inescapable presence. Combined with the tendency for self-organisation, the gatekeepers of high art are coming under siege. The emergence of an artistic subjectivity *aware of its own conditions of production* is alarming and I suspect far more threatening than most overtly political art ever was. After all, with few exceptions, artistic content today is infinitively expansive and therefore ultimately subsumable. What is not so easily subsumed is that which directs our attention towards the political economy of art itself. And if we think of culture as having a narrative, then this is like discovering an ellipsis within the story. This gap leads to uncertainty and unresolved questions.

Where did all these artists come from? What role do they play in the reproduction of the art world? How will they be managed? What follows next therefore may not offer perfect answers to these questions, but the practices listed below open up modest possibilities within the dominant cultural narrative that wants us to believe Zuccotti Park was an aberration and that resistance is futile. The time has come (once again) to allow the counter-narrative to write itself.

Rebel imaginary post-OWS

Arts & Labor started out as a working group of Occupy Wall Street and was organised just a few blocks away from Zuccotti Park in October of 2011. Since then they have built coalitions with other activists such as Occupy Museums as well as worked in conjunction with labor groups to organize direct action protests aimed at ‘exposing and rectifying economic inequalities and exploitative working conditions in our fields through direct action and educational initiatives’. To date, their most successful campaign involved working in conjunction with the Teamsters Union to forge a fair labour agreement for construction workers at the Frieze New York art fair. Picket lines and posters reading ‘Will Frieze Do the Right Thing?’ and ‘Frieze Rat Fair’ pressured the \$8 million operation into accepting new terms of employment. According to the group’s press release, ‘starting in 2015, Frieze New York has committed to hiring 100% union labor. We applaud Frieze’s effort in supporting fair labor practices and its long-term commitment to set an example for the rest of the industry’ (Arts & Labor website 2014, unpaginated). Though no way near as large as it was during the heyday of Occupy, Arts & Labor continues to meet on a regular basis and plan actions whose significance lies in the group’s ability to sustain a sharp focus on artists’ working conditions within the broader context of labour solidarity. Meanwhile, moving along similar lines, but across the pond, a new trade union emerged in England on May Day 2014 that aims to organise ‘professional visual and applied artists’. With offices in London and Newcastle, the Artists’ Union England seeks to ‘challenge the economic inequalities in the art world by working together [...] [for] fair and transparent payment’ (Hayley Hare 2014, unpaginated). Though it is too soon to know what kind of success Artists’ Union England might achieve, the information on its website and Facebook pages indicates that solidarity with other unions is a key concern, much as it is with Arts & Labor in New York City.

OWS also gave birth to Occupy Museums, a group that continues to carry out direct protest actions against major New York City cultural institutions, including most recently at the Guggenheim Museum, to which I will return in a moment. A different OWS spin-off, however, took an alternative approach towards developing a radical post-Occupy social agency. Rather than focus on common working conditions, as Arts & Labor and Occupy Museums does, members of Strike Debt addressed the broader issue of education loans and health-care insurance costs and how these are dragging the majority of the US population down into a bottomless pit of debt. Calling this financial burden 'illegitimate and unjust', Strike Debt argues that these financial obligations are a 'major source of profit and power for Wall Street that works to keep us isolated, ashamed, and afraid'. Debt, they insist, is 'a tie that binds the 99%'. Furthermore, debt is used to 'discipline us, deepen existing inequalities, and reinforce gendered, racial, and other social hierarchies'. Like other OWS offshoots, Strike Debt deployed a range of imaginative tactics to carry out its mission, including direct action, research, educational publications and artistic interventions that agitated about debt-related issues while simultaneously seeking to imagine broader 'creating alternatives' to neoliberal capitalism (Strike Debt website 2014, unpaginated).

Solidarity across an even wider span of space, culture and economic difference is key to the work of Gulf Labor Coalition, an organisation of which, in full disclosure, I am an active member. In 2006, the Guggenheim Museum Foundation publicly announced its plans to build a new, contemporary art showcase in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of the wealthiest nations in the world. However, for the majority immigrant population in the UAE, labour conditions approach that of slavery. Workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and other parts of South Asia pay steep recruitment fees in order to be transported to the UAE where they must repay these charges before receiving wages, in a process that can sometimes take years. With their passports held by the authorities, to return home is impossible. Attempts at labour organising are treated harshly and a suitable 'living wage' is almost never provided. Gulf Labor Coalition began as a boycott of the Abu Dhabi Guggenheim and has more recently grown into a weekly campaign of artworks and direct actions aimed at drawing attention to the dreadful labour situation in the UAE (Gulf Labor Coalition website 2014; Kaminer and O'Driscoll 2014). Meanwhile, a spin-off organisation known as G.U.L.F. (Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction) has staged several

occupations of the New York Guggenheim with extensive mainstream media coverage. In response to all of this pressure, the museum assures critics it is struggling to improve working conditions in Abu Dhabi and promises that it now sees this as a priority. Still, with ground breaking for the new project set to begin in 2015, scant time remains for the Guggenheim to back up their words with concrete actions.

In addition, there is a more expansively imaginative, even utopian response to the intensification of working conditions following the recent financial crisis. Catch a public performance by Aaron Burr Society on Wall Street some evening and you will see a crutch-wielding man in a top hat symbolically slaying a blood sucking banker while proposing to a crowd of tourists and night-shift workers a form of Left-libertarianism that involves, among other things, illegally brewing whiskey at home. Like an anti-Tea Party, the Aaron Burr Society channels one of the least known but most extensive post-Revolutionary rebellions in US history in which grain farmers, many of whom were war veterans, refused to pay federal taxes on home-brew to the newly formed government in an early rejection of centralised state power. Ultimately suppressed by President Washington, the Whiskey Rebellion, as relived through Aaron Burr Society today, calls on insurrectionary forces to take back the government 'before these Bastards with Aristocratic Pretensions Destroy the Planet' (Aaron Burr Society website 2010, unpaginated).

Using a different set of tactics, artist Caroline Woolard tries to imagine an alternative to both the art world and student debt with her online data-gathering project she calls bfamfaphd.com/. The project seeks to visualise the massive expenditure on higher education 'creative degrees' in the USA by crunching information on those seeking arts-related BAs, BFAs, MAs, MFAs and PhDs. After graphically demonstrating the growing population who want to become 'professional artists', she asks an almost naive question: 'If we pursue arts degrees out of a drive for community, craft, risk, audience, and knowledge, then how might we meet these needs and desires together, for a lifetime, not only 2–4 years?' Or, to put it another way, can the costs of getting a degree in art, which for most lead to a lifetime of debt, be channelled into producing another kind of society and economy on the ruins of the one we now inhabit? Woolard, who does not herself have a MFA degree, asks instead if it is possible to 'dream differently about ourselves?' That is certainly the question of the moment (Caroline Woolard website 2014, unpaginated).

In conclusion, and in gestation

Notwithstanding the pistol aimed at our collective heads, artists and other cultural workers are indeed spotlighting alternatives. Much like at the start of the last century, artistic production is once again today at the centre of a struggle over definitions and possibilities about what constitutes a genuine avant-garde practice, including who has the right to be called an artist, and what it means to imagine culture finally freed from capitalism. Questions are also being raised about the nature of labour, democracy, political agency and history. Because in order radically to occupy the present we inevitably wind up taking hold of the past and future, reinterpreting the archive with all its gaps and lacunae as we go. This is a significant moment. First, reclaiming the commons – a goal post-Occupy agents most often describe as their primary mission – requires preparing a space for something that is as yet unknown. Let us call it a new form of political-artistic subjectivity still in gestation. And, second, it seems that proclaiming the end of art yet once again turns out to be art's best chance of assuring its return. So did Occupy actually signal the end of contemporary art? Yes. Did it herald the birth of a new artistic subject? Absolutely. For, despite similarities between present-day circumstances and previous unsuccessful upsurges of socially engaged art in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the future of this post-Occupy, post-crisis moment has yet to be written. It still belongs to those forces that dare to produce systemic dissonance while believing that a better art world is possible.

(Re)Making the World: An Interview with Melanie Gilligan on Capitalist Exchange, Subject Formation and ‘Social Synthesis’

Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd

The interview that follows was conducted electronically in June 2014 between artist Melanie Gilligan (MG) and the editors of this volume (AD & KL). The bulk of the discussion revolves around key themes in *Popular Unrest*, Gilligan’s film from 2010, which was included in the ECONOMY exhibition. The interview title as such names some of these issues, though, importantly, these interweave with a broader thematisation of the processes that constitute contemporary capitalism and the world it, as much as the struggles against it, bring forth. Consequently, the interview often seeks to outline and underline the conditions of our participation as subjects in these processes, and, it is hoped, the positions stated below express the need further to explore the articulation of political responsibility on the part of individual and collective subjects.

AD & KL: Melanie, since 2008 you have been producing a body of cinematic work that stands out for its head-on address of capital as a complex totalising force encompassing the most abstract of forms and the most material effects we understand as ‘life’. Despite the sense of humour evident in your fictionalised renderings of the world of capital as life, we cannot but detect a line of thought that highlights capital’s power of constant regeneration. Following the first five years after the 2008 global crisis, there is now a sense that capital has ‘won’ and that it has managed to pacify and mute the recent ‘popular unrest’ – indeed, the title of your work included in the ECONOMY exhibition. Do you agree with this assessment of the situation?

MG: While this is certainly a moment where struggles against capitalism have met with obstacles, I don't think resistance will ever be pacified altogether and for good, or that capital can definitively 'win'. It is a constantly shifting situation and since you, I and everyone around us are part of capital's reproduction, we know that this process is full of contingency, and new events evolve on both larger systemic levels as well as in the particulars of situations. We will see what other developments throw out new opportunities for capital's supersession. Yet it's true that many anti-austerity protests, along with some that go further seeing capital itself as the target, have been crushed or sidelined. I made *Popular Unrest* in 2010, before the coalition government of the Tories and the Liberal Democrats got into power in the UK, so cuts hadn't reached their most severe or sparked the intensity of protests that was to come later that year. Then came the global protests erupting from 2010 onward. So *Popular Unrest* was in many ways a reflection upon a moment when the impacts of the crisis had not yet sparked such high levels of disruption, and so it was a rumination on *why* possibilities for collective struggle were so foreclosed. It would have been a very different film, were it made in the middle of 2011. But now, after many struggles have died down, I don't think I would diagnose things as 'over'. I don't believe capital's crises are over, and resistance doesn't only come about as a response to such crises.

I think that one major obstacle for resistance is that the sites of capital are increasingly dispersed, dematerialised, out of reach, intensely guarded and inviolable. Many of the protests in the past years have been sparked by actual operations of markets themselves – for instance, the attitude that the market took toward the bonds of certain European nations during the Euro crisis. Which is not to say that these events are without responsible agents, but those agents are so many and so distributed that it seems nearly impossible to direct concrete practices of protest toward them. I've written in many places (and so have others, of course) about how capital's self-valorising, self-expanding agency comes to acquire a self-propelling autonomy, and how this only accelerates further in the present era of financialisation (see Gilligan 2008a; 2008b).

We are faced with the impasse of how to pose a resistance to this obliterating dynamic of capital's self-expansion, which operates through billions of agents (i.e., people living in capitalism), people who of course do not see their own behaviour from the vantage point of the system of capital as a whole, but from the standpoint of their own interests and needs. How to oppose it rather than erroneously continue giving the crisis 'a face' or a body by identifying the primary causes in the actions of

individuals or groups – like when in the early moments of the financial crisis people would point to a figure like Madoff or to bankers or other financiers in general as the culprits – is an issue. Of course, bankers, hedge fund managers and many others involved in the crisis were irresponsible, to say the least, but if all that's taken away from the event is this, we will have learned nothing about the shape of crises to come.

AD & KL: In addition to a critique of capital as a universalised abstract force, *Popular Unrest* attempts an analysis of that force's architecture and attributes. One of the key attributes explored in the film is the relationship between micro and macro: for example, how an individual's data (micro) relates to population-scale mapping of data (macro). Do you detect a difference in how twenty-first-century capitalism constructs the relationship between, say, 'one' and 'many' in comparison to twentieth-century capitalism?

MG: Well, you mentioned that the work depicts the totalising power of capital. This is true – the film does show capital as a totality: the Spirit is presented as the *totality of human relations co-ordinated within and through capitalist exchange*. From another perspective, back in the late 1970s, Michel Foucault (2008) described biopolitics as focused on the scale of populations, operating on that scale of the social. In *Popular Unrest* I was trying to deal with how statistical data analysis – i.e., the 'big data' that today decides more and more of our lives, operates at that 'population' scale. Its innovation is that it can 'turn us into numbers', so to speak, but *without missing the minute social detail*. In other words, without overlooking the details of individuals which this particular phrase has always been used to imply. Being able to compute us algorithmically across the minute *and* macro-scale builds better, more realistic models for probability-generating biopolitical tools. Importantly, it's on this double scale that capital operates today.

In *Popular Unrest* I attempted to give form to the way that exchange relations produce a kind of immaterial connection across that scale of populations. Marx calls this scale the 'total social capital'.¹ It is an

1 Specifically, Marx argues: 'However the circuits of the individual capitals intertwine, presuppose and necessitate one another, and form, precisely in this interlacing, the movement of the total social capital. Just as in the simple circulation of commodities the total metamorphosis of a commodity appeared as a link in the series of metamorphoses of the world of commodities, so now the metamorphosis of the individual capital appears as a link in the series of metamorphoses of the social capital'. See Marx 1885.

inter-connected totality through the exchange of equivalents, which produces, for example, the way that the price of a commodity, be it good or labour, affects all others, or that labour conditions in one sector of the market will affect other ones. The architect of the Spirit refers to this when she says that money is 'a highway that stretched between every man, woman and child on the planet'. As you'll remember, in the film the scientists reveal to the group of people they study that although they may feel connected, what is actually causing this sense of being linked to one another is the market – or rather it is the complex interrelations and associations through the market. The group had said they feel part of a larger formation, like part of a body. It is revealed to them that what they are a part of is the *social body formed by capital*. They are brought together by the 'social synthesis', as Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978) calls it, effected in the connections made by exchange.

AD & KL: Indeed, one of the most arresting themes in *Popular Unrest* is the co-option of the newly formed 'communities' of insurgents by the community of scientists who appear able to turn everything and everyone into a collection of data, openly in the service of capital. In general, we see in this narrative of the film an insightful commentary about social divisions. In this case though, social divisions do not reiterate class divisions but posit a knowledge-production group of workers (scientists) against groups of potentially insurgent subjects. Would you say that capital is now in a position to multiply social divisions in ways that incorporate and make use of, but ultimately exceed, class?

MG: Class continues to assert itself, even if, more often than not when it comes to the working class, it can only be encountered as *negative identity*. Yes, some antagonisms today take forms that are different from the ways that class conflict is traditionally conceived. However, still the main conflicts are between those who hold wealth and those who don't.

In *Popular Unrest*, it's communicated that the people in these groupings are from different classes and backgrounds. I think to understand what role the scientists play is not to see them as representative of knowledge workers in general (though they do signal a rise of a new paradigm of technical knowledge) but as meaningful for what they bring to light in the lives of the group. Yes, the connected group have the potential to be an insurgency but, like I say, the connecting force that brings them together is that of the market.

What commentary there might be in the work on social divisions

comes out of the way the technological, biological, medical and computational are *a means* of capital to bypass the subject. For example, physical indicators tell the female scientist that the group member Peter doesn't mean what he says about losing his brother. She clearly states: 'It might be a true statement but you didn't mean it. I can see your body didn't mean it'. We know from elsewhere in the film that indicators of physical health are being used to measure each individual's 'market indicators'. Much as algorithms frequently decide how pay-day loans are doled out today, neuroscience or other sciences of subjectivity are used to form probabilities of a subject's futures. In *Popular Unrest* I was trying to make the point that these factors circumvent the subject and its own narrativisation. There is a similar sense with the conditions imposed by operations of economic markets, for instance, when it is revealed that the uncanny sense of connection to one another felt by the group is actually a product of the connections of exchange relations – this is something that completely rewrites the subjective narrative that the grouping has made for themselves.

Overall, as more and more technological or market-oriented processes happen outside the subject and operate directly on economies (which, of course, operate on us), we'll need to better understand them. If there's a sense in which something pointed to in this work could be seen to exceed class, it would be the technological operations that now make up the preponderant aspects of capital's functioning – e.g., markets traded digitally (at speeds defying human limits), subjects comprehended and treated neuroscientifically, that exceed the subjectivation of class. But these phenomena are still nevertheless overwhelmingly deployed with *outcomes related to class*, in the interest of the ruling class.

There is, however, a very prominent element in *Popular Unrest* that pertains to class relations – the fact that people are being killed by the Spirit during its anomalous 'out of control', 'hiccup' moments. The Spirit's 'labour-saving calculations' are turning homicidal but this emanates from the system's logical processes: the Spirit (i.e., capital) *expels labour* from the process of production in order to continue to be productive. This aspect of the story is a concrete manifestation of the antagonism between the social reproduction of workers (or anyone else) by capital and capital's own reproduction.

AD & KL: Precarious working conditions which put 'the soul' to work together with the multi-faceted web of surveillance and measurement to which we are all now subjected (through CCTV, social media exposure,

performance reviews at work etc.) have been said to contribute to a new form of capitalist reality dominated by anxiety (see Berardi 2009).² In *Popular Unrest*, one of your characters observes that 'feelings are one of the things the Spirit understands best', and indeed the manipulation of affect and the management of emotions appear to be central to your understanding of economic behaviour and associated power relations. What is remarkable is that when the spontaneous 'groupings' break out across the globe, they more closely resemble self-help support circles than revolutionary cells, while therapy-based tactics are employed by the scientists as part of their 'treatment'. This calls to mind the use of emotional management specialists in Fordist factories as a means by which to allay unrest among workers (see Illouz 2007). In a previous interview (Holert 2012) you have noted your pessimism regarding the future of social movements. Would you say that the contemporary obsession with feelings, emotions and therapy impedes solidarity and the possibility to imagine things differently? Does it simply sustain our ability to perform within increasingly oppressive contexts, or can it offer new insights and perspectives through connecting a critical awareness of subjective lived experience to broader structural problems? Or, to put it another way, how can we act under the debilitating force of perpetual anxiety?

MG: Therapy techniques are definitely employed by the Spirit's scientists, but not in order to treat the group. They are studying them for the Spirit so that this system can gather information about their affective and physical reactions in order to better influence activities related to work, whether this be to intensify real subsumption in the labour process or to hone processes around the job for better value extraction. They take this approach because, as the architect of the Spirit says, in this moment of neoliberal capitalism 'we don't control people', so it is important to be able to pre-empt their behaviour. In better understanding affects such as duress, pain, frustration, the Spirit can also better understand the *limits* of what people will be subjected to; thus all the exercises devoted to pain in the film. The more people suffer cuts to wages, job instability or austerity measures the more the limits of what they can take are tested.

I should reiterate that I'm not pessimistic or optimistic about social movements. I also don't think that a better understanding of affect and

2 See also the Plan C website: www.weareplanc.org/we-are-all-very-anxious/# (accessed 14 July 2014).

emotion is a dead end politically. Quite the opposite. For this reason also it is imperative to continue investigating and interpreting the relationship between capital and subjectivity. To answer your question, when one of the scientist characters says 'feelings is one of the things that Spirit understands best', he exemplifies an identifiable attitude evident throughout many fields such as neuroscience, cognitive science and its applications in artificial intelligence as a computational science of subjectivity. According to this trend, the aspect of the subject that can be best comprehended and made useful is *not* conscious thought, because information around this is currently still quite indeterminate. Rather, it is affect and all the physical factors that signal affective processes which are considered better-functioning anchors for a neuroscientific and technological grasp of what's happening inside the subject. This may sound like quite a specialist concern but actually its implications are extremely broad and significant.

Subjectivation that is in the interests of the continued expansion of capital occurs as we know through, as you say, affective conditions anxieties and insecurity, or also desires and needs. During the period that I was making *Self-capital* (2009) and then *Popular Unrest* (2010) I was really struck by how the subject (of the Enlightenment, the sovereign political subject of Western modernity, for instance) is being dismantled and we become 'dividuals', as Gilles Deleuze (1992, 6) described it. This means that while on the level of cognition subjects have never been more individuated and solipsistic, it is actually also quite necessary to the functioning of capitalist economies for subjects to have this hypertrophied relation to their own subjectivity, while at the same time their functioning as subjects of economic systems and systems of corporate and governmental data analyses, to name two examples, de-individuates them. This is part of the explanation for the repeated phrase in the film: 'of course you're special, special like everyone else'. It is the rejoinder of computational statistical analysis (big data), articulated by scientists and the Spirit's architect, to such a subjectivist individualism. Although today this is ever more dismantled and exposed as fallacy, it is also very useful to the smooth running of capital, as the driver of entrepreneurial zeal, where the phrase to 'get paid' as an abstract description of triumph is one of the highest forms of success.

AD & KL: Could you expand on how, or better why, groups form in *Popular Unrest*? This happens early in the film and is conveyed as a mysterious process. For readers who have not watched the film, the

process is: for reasons unknown to themselves, some individuals feel the urge to gather at a specific place where they meet others having felt the same urge. Neither they nor we (the viewers) know, however, what generates this urge and why individuals feel compelled to form groups. A revolution needs many people. But so does capitalist production. What does 'getting many people together' mean then when these people appear to be interchangeable?

MG: This is an important question. Subjects today are inextricably formed by imperatives conveyed through the present moment of capital. Of course, at the same time, the possibility of a shift away from the capitalist system requires subjects being able to behave differently than what is needed to reproduce themselves in relation to the needs of capital.

To briefly go back to your question about the attitude toward affect in *Popular Unrest*, what I take aim at is an *individualising framework* for understanding the causalities around their need to come together. I think there are much better ways to understand political subjectivation. So in this work I show the assumptions the group (as standing in, at that moment, for a wider social) make. I show the group members' inability to apprehend their sense of connection through anything but an individualistic understanding.

The people who come together to form groups never imagine that they could be drawn together because they need to come together *to fight* the present order, or in that they're having, let's say, a sense of solidarity. Instead, they impose a series of tropes of individual narrative on *what seems to them* a 'mysterious' predicament. First, they wonder: have we come together to help the character John with his trauma? Are we here to help each other with our personal pain? Then: is there something about each of our feelings we can better understand? And, finally: are we psychically connected? I was showing these as dead-end paths without a better understanding of our mutual and collective determining of one another.

In relation to this problem, the first part of the film sets up a 'human story' as a decoy of sorts to draw these subjective considerations into relation with the core of the story which is more about capital as a system and how it relates to subjects. It's not just a decoy for the viewers alone. That human story is also the decoy which deceives the group as well.

AD & KL: The desperate desire for intimacy among participants in the groupings is contrasted with spectacular random violence which sees

characters including call-centre workers, gym goers and a businesswoman brutally knifed to death. The narrative based around crisis, austerity and enclosures thereby brings forth the shocking disposability of workers under capital and can be read against the growing number of sociological studies and newspaper articles which analyse the causal links between these process and dramatic declines in populations' physical and mental health. The abstract is made concrete, as it were. Can you tell us more about the place of the corporeal and materiality more generally in your work?

MG: You're absolutely right that the violence we see today where workers are treated as disposable evinces a new, striking relationship evolving between the abstractions that come about in capitalist exchange and the concrete materiality or physicality of subjects. Beyond what I pointed out already about how the killings in *Popular Unrest* are meant to communicate capital's tendency to expel labour (workers) from production, thus ceasing to socially reproduce them, you're right that capital's antagonism to social reproduction seen throughout the phenomena that on aggregate give us contemporary neoliberal economies takes its toll on human physicality and subjectivity. The corporeal tends to appear in my work shot through with abstractions, often those related to exchange. In *Popular Unrest* we see the physical and affective as captured for capital. We hear it repeated a few times that in working with the Spirit, the grouping is adapting to its needs. In one exercise, the group lies prone while a scientist says 'let it happen', 'let the Spirit come to you', as the group become convulsed with pain. These responses of distress in a way take an abstracted form as in these sections I'm trying to evoke the ever-proliferating ways that subjects are made to adapt to the demands imposed on them by a more and more punitive economy.

The relation of the physical and affective to cognitive intellection has run throughout my work since my first performance work as an artist, *The Miner's Object* (2006). As you probably gathered from my previous answer, I'm really interested in how the neuroscientific as a paradigm is shaping the present understanding of subjectivity, and how, as this continues, its forms of knowledge evolve in relation to capitalist frameworks.

In many places my work goes into the rifts that consequently open up between subjective self-perception and experience and measurable and quantifiable bio-physical data. For instance, this is evident in the moment in *Popular Unrest* when one of the scientists says 'acting out the

physiological effects really makes you feel them', implying that 'feeling' in this case is simply the correlation between a host of body states that can be engaged. This, of course, relates to your earlier question on what it means that the Spirit understands emotions best – the problems posed by conscious intention and volition are neutralised if you have things made simple – yes or no – biophysically.

With my film *Self-capital* (2009) this became an interest in how the subject faced with austerity is now confronted with material and physical reactions as these erupt in actions mixed with thought and speech. In *Popular Unrest* there are many moments in the sessions with the scientists about the physical body as abstraction for capital: the nightmarish vision that characters have of blood and viscera, the part played by the scientists in the story, the whole horror theme in the work, and subsequent apparitions. In the world of *Popular Unrest*, the measurement and regulation of people's potential to work, which is, as you can imagine, an inherently nebulous quantity, occurs in their personal 'market indicators' and 'energy output profiles'. And when you're in a deficit position (like the unemployed person calling the Spirit help centre at the film's start), the Spirit takes punitive measures to ensure it maintains the same level of extraction or at least puts the subject to some other ends useful to itself. An important phrase in the film is 'the Spirit is making you meet', which is reiterated at another point as 'the Spirit is making them meat'. You are being reduced to the biophysical and this is good for capital, not for you.

AD & KL: Your artworks and writing are predicated, at least in part, on a desire to de-mystify complex economic systems and processes. Though creative forms of knowledge production have traditionally been held primarily within the purview of documentary modes, their appropriation by contemporary artists can be said to have effected a form of privatisation. Yet you remain committed to reaching beyond the white (or black) cube and conventional art audiences, disseminating your fictional work freely through the Internet. What's more, the use of amplifications, speculations, and humour to reveal and explain hidden economic structures and relations also appears to be in keeping with realist interventions. How would you situate your work in relation to political – or 'critical' realism?

MG: The method of my works *Crisis in the Credit System*, *Self-capital* and *Popular Unrest*, using fiction forms but packing them with information and argument, is, in a way, an attempt to break down divisions between

intellectual work and entertainment, or between discursive modes and the non-discursive modes of cognition activated when we watch a story. I tell stories that endeavour to speak about the world we live in but they really do so through a process that conveys information within situations and characters, engaging a type of knowledge that emanates from practice. Stylistically these works really aren't realist, though you make an interesting point that the focus of their subject matter is a realist one. In a way these films are a compression of quite particular research on historically contingent events (i.e., the realism you refer to) and at the same time broader and more abstract theorizations of the larger systemic forces that shape them.

As a result, the sequence of plot events and characters in these works has a form that is something like a postulation or an argument, although the works happen on many levels other than language. It is operating through a set of abstract ideas that are shadowing the entities in the film. For instance, in *Popular Unrest*, 'the Spirit', the killings, the groupings, the way that an event intersects another, how characters behave or the way they relate to the scenario – these are all elements of the building argument. There are lots of aspects in this method where logical thinking and illogical or intuitive processes intersect. What happens between them has a double existence in the work as both story-as-form and also a meta-argument.

AD & KL: In *ECONOMY* as a curatorial narrative we proceeded from the thesis that art since 1990 (that is, since the demise of the Soviet world and the ideologies that sustained the twentieth-century Cold War mentality) has been increasingly interested in charting production, and that this is a major shift from what used to be contemporary art's focus (consumerism) under postmodernism, a hegemonic cultural narrative in the 1970s and 1980s. Does your own work engage an investigation of production as opposed to consumption?

MG: *Popular Unrest* doesn't look at consumption. It does incorporate production but always through *relations of exchange* which are more thoroughly thematised throughout the work. As I was saying earlier, it's very interesting to me to think about how we are connected in a highly mediated sense through exchange – a type of abstract collectivity that is atomising and works against the building of collective resistance. It is an abstract collectivity-for-capital. Such mediated contact and connections are the connections that proliferate today, in early twenty-first-century

capitalism, becoming explicit in the technologies and forms that are developing at this moment of capital – from social media sites to financial markets to commodity distribution logistics. There are whole sections of *Popular Unrest* devoted to the notion of equivalence in capitalist exchange (going under the title of operations of the Spirit, of course) and how *the collective computations effected in equivalence* constantly capture more and more.

Within this, there are various ways that *Popular Unrest* focuses on labour as a commodity: for instance, when the group, under the encouragement of the scientists, begins acting out their moments of encounter with the Spirit-as-capitalist-exchange. They are all showing their activity at work – for example, Guy shows his work as a shop assistant, John as a photographer, Christy answers phones, and these mesh together with other reactions and behaviours. It's like they're showing their labour abstracted into its equivalence form, but then re-incorporated into the details of their lived situation. Returning to your previous question, I guess that's my brand of realism.

II

Economy, Capital and the Commons

Massimo De Angelis

Economy

What is the economy? In conventional discourse, here drawn from Wikipedia (2013), but echoing any first-year Economics textbook, the economy is the system of human activity characterised by ‘the production, distribution or trade, and consumption of goods and services in a region or country’. In accounting terms, however, an economy is the sum total of all monetary transaction between two agents, whether these are individuals, organisations or nations. Whenever something is sold (and therefore bought) at a given price, we have a transaction.

In this sense, what we call the economy is a sphere of social action that is touched by money, and so not all production and exchanged goods are considered but only those that are monetised. This leaves out a lot. To mention just a few, in no particular order: the experience of work, sweat, pain, anguish, fear, power, dignity, unwaged labour, solidarity, mutual aid, joy, conviviality, sustainability, resilience, loyalty, community, commons. The economy therefore is a selection of human interaction and correspondent values among the many constituting reality. Yet this selection is so critical that the economy is elevated to the most important thing we need to care about, and a correspondence is drawn between companies’ bottom line (profit) and nations’ bottom line (rate of GDP growth) while governments increasingly bow their policies to what they perceive to be the ‘needs of the economy’ over the needs of the poor, the need for social justice, the need for education, the need for freedom, the need for solidarity, the need for maintaining the natural

environment within which human interaction is possible. And all this, thanks to the lobby work of powerful corporate and finance clans and to the economists who, through their models, reproduce the belief in ‘the economy’ as a *separate* sphere of social existence. Indeed, the economy exists and has so much power by virtue of its creation and *divinisation* – a divinisation that has to do with the fact that we depend so much on it for our reproduction, for our livelihoods. The economy thus places the need to get a living *versus* the need to get a life, and money stands in between.

Capital and economy

Certainly, the economy, understood as the exchange of goods for money or for a promise to pay, has existed for thousands of years, although money itself finds its origin in non-economic causes. For example, from tribute, blood-money, bride-money and in ceremonial and religious rites (Davies 2002). Yet the economy as a social sphere which we are dependent on for social reproduction and livelihood is not very old – just a few hundred years – and corresponds to the development and dominance of a social force we call capital. Capital is not the ‘factor of production’ economists refer to; it is not just the machines, the raw material, the buildings and the money invested to produce something, but *the value of all this* that seeks to accrue, to grow through profit, and it can ultimately do so only through work and its exploitation. Capital therefore is a social system and an organisation of social relations that have this impelling urge to grow, to acquire more spheres of life and nature. Consequently, capital organises the whole of life and nature through its own coding and measures – that of competitiveness and profitability. And the latter is the product of the exploitation of labour, the ‘sucking up’ of life-energies that are transformed into profit.

But this internal process of transformation that occurs in factories, offices and fields is not sufficient for capital. If it is true that commodities, things for sale and the economy have existed for thousands of years, the desire to turn everything into a commodity (the things that embed the buy/sell code of the economy) is far more recent and corresponds to the beginning of the development of the power of capital. And this beginning ‘is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire’ (Marx 2011 [1867], chapter 26) in the form of the expropriation of bodies, land, rivers and means of livelihoods from communities. This expropriation, that Marx called primitive or original accumulation

and we call 'enclosures', to echo the enclosures between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in England, is the precondition for capital development, as, on the one hand, it concentrates 'resources' to invest ('capital') in the hands of few and, on the other, creates a mass of people who own nothing else but their labour power which they can sell for a wage. When successful, enclosures produce impoverishment and forced migration, as communities can no longer sustain themselves. And this is generally accompanied by a tightening of the state repression against migration and vagrancy. When not successful, enclosures are halted as the result of community struggles that refuse effectively to turn the resources they often held in common into commodities that enter the cycle of capitalist production.

This 'beginning' of capital power did not occur only before the industrial revolution, or with the slave trade, which put West Africans to work in plantations on land expropriated from indigenous people in the Americas threatened by genocide. This beginning is a *recurrent* one, for two reasons (De Angelis 2007). First, capital seeks to expand and therefore throws into economic cycles always new fragments of life and nature as commodities. New domains of life – anything from seeds to the atmosphere, knowledge or radio waves – are open fields for capital to enclose, commodify and on which to attach a price tag. Second, people's struggles seek to de-commodify things, turn them into resources held in commons in many ways. Capital's enclosures are also aimed at these newly established commons. For example, the period since the end of the 1970s – that many regard as the phase of neoliberal capital – witnessed cuts in social services, education, pensions, transfers to poor and the destruction of the so-called welfare state that many countries in the West set up after the Second World War in response to working-class struggles in the pre-war period. At the same time, a new wave of enclosures have accompanied what we might call the last phase of globalisation (reflecting the previous phase of world colonisation) by means of the privatisation of water and electricity, rising bills for the poor, expropriation of land and rivers to build dams and factories, destruction of forests to give space to monocultures and so on. These are examples of *new* enclosures as much as the austerity policies of the present crisis and the new wave of land-grabbing that accompanies the current global restructuring to increase profitability.

The commons and economy

If capital rides on economic circuits, as these are the best means to realise the profit that it seeks, other types of social systems also access the economy to meet needs that are necessary (but generally not sufficient) for their sustenance and reproduction. I am talking about the sphere of the commons, those social systems that we are more familiar with in our daily life, even if we do not call them that. I am talking about the sphere of social reproduction, where people form communities of reproduction such as households or different kinds of associations to reproduce one or many of their needs in a non-commodified way. Commons are social systems in which resources are pooled by a community of people who also govern these resources to guarantee the latter's sustainability (if they are natural resources) and the reproduction of the community. These people engage in commoning, that is *a form of social labour* that bears a direct relation to the needs of the people, or the commoners.

When patriarchal hierarchies do not turn them into micro-states, households are one example of commons. Networks of supporting friends are another sphere of commons, whether consisting in long-lasting relationships or in temporary and ephemeral inter-personal ones. Temporary commons are still commons. Community organisations and associations, social centres, neighbourhood associations, self-managed workshops and factories, community gardens, water associations are all forms of commons systems. As are peer-to-peer networks in cyberspace: sharing music, codes, files, books, and promoting all form of digital cooperation. All this implies that commons need not be *situated* in a particular locality, although the ones that are have also the strategic task of reclaiming a territory. But we should not think of commons as a third sector beyond state and market. Or, if we wish to do so, then we should not think of sectors as clear market segments running in parallel with one another. Commons are both 'inside' states and capital – and to the extent that states and capital influence the *subjectivities of commoners* reproducing commons, states and capital are themselves inside commons. Thus we also find commons on the shop floor of factories and in the canteens of offices among co-workers supporting one another, sharing their lunch and developing forms of solidarity and mutual aid. We also find commons among the unemployed, squatting together in empty houses, sharing tricks on how to fool the benefit office, or among the poor in shantytowns and favelas. We find commons inside schools and universities, commons often divided by hierarchical

lines: the management commons, the teacher commons, the student commons. On the occasion of radical mobilisation, some of these commons build bridges, many of which somehow disappear when the movement wave retreats.

Two autopoietic systems

Commons and capital are two distinct autopoietic systems, that is they both aim at their reproduction though in different ways, each through particular modes and values. Capital can reproduce itself only through profit and its accumulation; commons, instead, through the reproduction of the resources *and* the community that comprises them. Both commons and capital may employ high or low technology, make use of oil or not, have functions that require certain levels of authority; they may or may not have communities hierarchically divided along racial and sexual lines. And not only capital but also a commons may or may not entail a community divided into wealth hierarchies. When we say commons, we are not therefore pointing at utopia, nor when we say capital are we pointing at dystopia. We certainly do not believe that capital can bring us to utopia, since its own *conatus* of self-preservation is boundless accumulation, and the processes for realising the latter are not only environmentally destructive but also socially divisive and exploitative. But we certainly cannot claim that commons will lead us inevitably to utopia, since 'utopias' would be made of concrete structures that are contingent to particular situations. What we can claim though is that the *autopoietic organisations* of commons and capital have distinct characters.¹

Commons and capital, however, are often linked, 'coupled' through the buying and selling site of the market, that is the 'economy'. Both capital and the commons do some buying and some selling, although again through different priorities and as part of different movements. Capital buys in order to sell, and sell dearer, at a profit – in the case of commercial capital, or as a means of production to generate commodities that fetch a profit. The commons, instead, sell commodities in order to buy means of sustenance and reproduction. For example, a household within which one or two members sell their labour power to get an

1 They are autopoietic systems in the sense that they are systems able to reproduce themselves and maintain their different organisation. The notion of autopoiesis has been developed in biology by Maturana and Varela (1980 [1972]).

income in order to reproduce the household; or an association engaging in petty trade to fund itself, or a social centre selling beer at a concert to buy the materials for building a kitchen. Buying in order to sell and selling in order to buy, from the time of Aristotle, are considered two opposite forms of praxis, the former governed by a life-activity wasted into accumulation and the latter by a life governed by the needs and desires of reproduction.

An immediate conclusion about the specific autopoietic requirement of each system is that what we conventionally call 'economic growth' is only an indispensable requirement for the sustainability of capital systems, not of commons systems. Commons systems could reproduce themselves in a condition of what some environmentalist thinking has called 'a-growth' (Latouche 2009), that is where there is dis-accumulation in the capital's circuit, without at all undermining their expanded reproduction and improvement in the perceived quality of their processes. Thus, overall reduction of GDP could be compatible with (a) an extension of selling in order to buy circuits – for example, coinciding with re-localisation of commodity chains and the decline in the scale of productive activities (small workshops, local farmers markets etc.); (b) extending the realms of non-commodity exchanges, such as administrative or gift exchanges in Polanyi's tradition (Polanyi 1968) (the former indicates transfer from the state and/or from the rich to the poor or to the funding of social services; the latter indicates those horizontal exchanges among networks of people and communities that reproduce virtuous social relations and build social bonds); (c) multiplication of the commons to reduce the dependence on capital for their reproduction.

Indeed, (a), (b) and (c) can be, and have been, conceived as part of a virtuous hybrid. Take, for example, Community Supported Agriculture schemes. They do involve both commodity exchanges (i.e., farmers selling produce to consumers) and, at the same time, commoning between consumers and small farmers to negotiate, in some cases, quality, quantity and price of produce guaranteeing an income to farmers (like the Genuino Clandestino networks in many cities in Italy).² In these networks, consumers and producers make regular assemblies, bypassing state regulations of what is defined as 'organic' produce through the

2 Launched in Bologna in 2010, though the actions of Campiaperti Association, Genuino Clandestino has been a nationwide campaign in Italy aiming at defending small farmers' organisation of production against the requirements of industrial food units.

purchase of organic producer licences and, instead, self-determining themselves on the basis of 'trust', built within the network. This is a case in which the 'economy' of the market is strictly shaped by commons rather than by capital.

Economy and crisis

The current global crisis is a case in point showing the relation between capital and commons through the 'trends' of the economy. The event that initiated it, the sub-prime crisis in 2008, was an epochal moment – one of those moments after which the world is no longer what it seemed just a few months earlier, or at least what the world seen through neoliberal eyes seemed like. The global crisis that followed could *prima facie* indicate the end of the neoliberal era, as we have known it since its emergence in the late 1970s.

The global restructuring developed in the last few decades after the fall of Keynesianism and the welfare state, along with the development of financial speculation and the use of debt, has allowed the reduction in the *value of labour power* of global North workers without a proportional decline in living standards. It has done this by simply lowering the prices of commodities that enter the wage baskets and increasing credit to the poor. So, for example, the planetary expansion of sweatshops in global commodity chains means that US workers can buy trousers or digital radios at Wal-Mart at low prices. Because of cheap service labour from the South and East – the result of massive poverty caused by structural adjustment – many families in Europe and the USA now hire Filipina, Mexican or Eastern European women to take care of children and aged grandparents. In the South, meanwhile, this process has made it possible to discipline new masses of workers into factories and assembly lines, fields and offices, thus extending enormously capital's reach in defining the terms – the what, the how, the how much – of social production.

And, in both North and South, the enclosure of resources means an increased dependence of working-class communities upon markets to reproduce livelihoods, less power to resist the violence and arrogance of those whose priority is only to seek profit, less power to prevent the market from running their lives and, overall, a generalised state of precarity, where life itself is precarious and nothing can be taken for granted. Indeed, both North and South workers have been *systemically* linked – something that is revealed by a pattern in global finance that some describe as Bretton Woods II (Dooley, Folkes-Landau and Garber 2003) and is expressed by

the enormous US trade deficit and correspondent surplus in China and other exporting countries. This systemic link between surplus and deficit countries allows the generation of always-new debt instruments like the one that has recently resulted in the sub-prime crisis. The ongoing recycling of accumulated surplus of countries exporting to the USA, such as China and the oil-producing countries, is what has permitted financiers to create new credit instruments in the USA.

This global system thus was the integration of a series of 'deals' made nationally with localised working classes. By 'deal' I do not mean an agreement entered into by two or more parties for their mutual benefit but a *modus operandi* through which social forces and social actors in often clashing positionalities happened to be pacified and systemically coupled (Midnight Notes 1985). For example, the 'deal' offered by the US elites to the US working people during the neoliberal era has been something like this: 'you give us a relative social peace and accept capitalist markets as the main means through which you reproduce your own livelihoods, and we will give you access to cheaper consumption goods, access to credit and the illusion that gains in terms education, health, pensions and social security could be made through the speculative means of stock markets and housing prices'. In turn, to allow the reproduction of labour power of 250 million of unemployed, under-employed and dispossessed Chinese, the 'communist' leaders need a double-digit rate of growth, and therefore they need Western markets and their capital as well as Western know-how and technologies. It is for this reason that they have been willing to recycle back to the USA their enormous trade surpluses, thus contributing to the liquidity for the expansion of the many forms of debt in the USA. This is a vicious cycle that locks everybody into an endless rat race.

At the same time in China and other zones in the Global South people are being offered a different sort of deal: industrial employment at wages that, while very low by international standards, are still substantially higher than anything obtainable in the impoverished countryside. But attached to this there is also the promise that, through their link to global markets, their conditions of living will be gradually improved. While over the last few years in many such areas wages seem to be growing thanks to the intensification of popular struggles (particularly in China), such gains are impossible to make generally available. What is being offered to the South is the promise to expand the existing urban middle classes, who already model their lifestyle and consumption patterns on Northern ones. Although an understandable longing for

'betterment' is at the basis of what has been sold as the 'American dream', what makes it a dream is precisely the fact that, even in the USA, it has never meant eliminating wage hierarchies, just reshaping them. This is a game in which there must, *necessarily*, be losers.

At the global level, however, this system of 'betterment' is impossible to generalise and extend to more and more people, for two reasons. First, environmentally speaking, no matter how much we recycle or how many energy-efficient light bulbs we use, it would still require several planets to accommodate an 'American dream' way of life modelled on high energy and individualised consumption patterns for six billion people. Second, precisely because this way of life requires the further expansion of competition of all against all, of borders and property regimes, of enclosures and dispossession, it must always necessarily be dependent on hierarchy and exclusion: it must be premised on a massive devaluation of capital and labour power, which would push up the proportion of profit on capital invested (the so-called rate of profit) and therefore would attract more investment. This devaluation is indeed demanded by the crisis to restart growth or capital accumulation. In other words, middle-class 'betterment' is an illusion constructed in between the Scylla of ecological disaster and the Charybdis of poverty. The only thing that this model of development can create is gated communities of whatever is left of middle-class households accessing privatised social services within the borders of their patrolled walls, surrounded by hordes of poor with little access to public services and whose entrance through the gates of those enclaves is managed for the purpose of serving those communities. And yet, capital Plan A still insists that this is the way forward.

It is in this context that we must read the crisis of 2008. The crisis followed a series of burst bubbles and Federal Reserve interventions on interest rates which kept inflating the economy with debt used to fund speculation, but also to pay for housing, for education, for consumption and, for many, for the bare necessities. In the late 1990s, the dotcom bubble burst and high-tech stocks crashed, opening a recession. After the 9/11 attacks on American ground there were widespread fears of financial collapse, as employment kept dropping through July 2003 (in spite of the recession being 'officially over' in November 2001). Between January and December 2001, the Fed cut its benchmark interest rate 11 times, dramatically dropping the key lending rate from 6.5 per cent to 1.75 per cent. This led to negative real-interest rates (when inflation was factored in), which meant that banks borrowed money to make loans and, in real dollars, repaid less than they had borrowed. Cheap credit was a strategy

to avoid and delay financial collapse and consequent global meltdown, but it was also how the Fed created the next bubble. Crucially, *it was also a strategy used to sell the American dream to the poorest in presence of declining real wages.*

Indeed, after the dotcom crash, the era of easy credit led to speculation on the housing market. Home mortgage debt begun to show double-digit growth, settling at around 16.6 per cent a year in the period between 2000 and 2005, compared to about 9.2 per cent a year in the 1990s. This added to other working-class indebtedness (such as credit card debt), which grew through the last three decades. Loans were made available to working-class people who would not have qualified previously because of low incomes or inadequate assets, and lenders did not seem interested in checking borrowers' statements. This was not only owing to cheap credit but also to the way mortgages were packaged into more complex debt instruments (which also led to the international ramifications of the crisis).

The novel aspect of the 'new' mortgage market is the banks' offloading of risk to the market through *securitisation*, i.e., repackaging these mortgages (home buyers' *promises* to pay back the loan with interest) into securities that combine a wide range of risks and promises of repayment by a variety of agents. Thus, in the years before the crisis, investments were sold off to hedge funds and pension funds and back to commercial banks themselves. All these factors, plus the contradictory systems of incentives for different agents in their efforts to maximise profit, caused drastic increases in home prices, which almost doubled in the 2000–05 period. This, of course, was fundamental to allow strata of working-class people to turn into speculators and compensate their falling wages with capital gains on their houses. Ultimately, however, this bubble burst. They always do, sooner or later. And the main, obvious reason is that debt *must* be paid back, with interest. And this is not always possible, if the cost of repayment increases above what the borrower can afford. Thus, one factor contributing to the wave of defaults was the Fed's 17 interest rate hikes between June 2004 and June 2006. The higher rates affected a variety of borrowers, but especially the more vulnerable ones with adjustable-rate mortgages. According to some estimates, in July 2007, a month before the official opening of the sub-prime crisis, home foreclosures in the USA were almost 100 per cent above the previous year. The increase in foreclosures in turn contributed to a fall in further lending and a drop in home prices. By March 2008, average home prices in the USA had fallen by almost 20 per cent from their peak in June

2006. A fall in house prices in turn prevented many homeowners from playing the speculators' game (borrowing against the rising value of their houses) for the purpose of maintaining their livelihoods.

What followed from the crisis was a multi-million state intervention to save banks 'too big to fail' in the sense that their going bankrupt would have threatened the stability of the entire capitalist system in its current form. In the USA, President Obama also attempted some stimulus to get the economy growing, but with little success. The expectations of profitability are too low for investors to re-start the economy, and the accumulated debt is too high. The crisis turned from a private debt crisis into a sovereign debt crisis, with countries like Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Portugal in the firing line of 'displeased' financial capital for spending too much in debt services. In 2014, strong austerity policies remain fashionable in Europe, thus closing with the same type of policies the cycle of neoliberalism initiated more than four decades ago.

Impasse

Post-2008, the economic crisis became a capitalist crisis of social stability, not a simple recession – that is, a crisis that requires a realignment and reconfiguration of class relations and new systems of governance in order to re-establish growth and accumulation (De Angelis 2007). The last two occasions on which a real change in capital's governance occurred (in the post-Second World War period with the embracement of 'Keynesianism' and in the late 1970s with the shift to 'neoliberalism') were accompanied by periods of intense social struggles which developed *senses* and perceptions guiding and orienting social movements towards alternative socio-economic arrangements. When this happens, capital, fearing that 'ideas grip the masses' thus turning them into a material force that can put fetters on its own development or even decree its end, is suddenly willing to shift 'governance' paradigm. Capital then appears ready and willing to absorb some of the struggles, striking appealing deals with *some* sections of the struggling movement and, importantly, displacing the cost of doing so onto other communities, sections of the working class and environments across the globe. The division of the social body has always been a strategy of capital development (De Angelis 2000; Midnight Notes Collective and Friends 2009; *The Commoner* spring/summer 2007).

However, this time, things are getting a bit more complicated. With no world war in sight that would allow devaluation of capital, a mass of

debt that prevents re-inflating the economy with further debt, levels of economic growth that are insufficient to repay existing debt and a planet that is warming up dangerously, my thesis is that in facing *this* crisis of social stability, capital faces an *impasse*. By ‘impasse’ I understand a crucial moment in the growth of a social system. It is a moment in which vital support for this system is not forthcoming in sufficient degree, especially from the *environment* of the capitalist system. Capital, understood as social force organising social cooperation for the purpose of accumulation, has a twofold environment. One is constituted by social systems that reproduce the various facets of life in a non-commodified way and in which access to money is, at most, only one of their contingent aims (the bulk of which is represented by meeting needs and establishing forms of sociality). I am thinking here about the universe of social cooperation that is at most connected to capital circuits through ‘selling in order to buy’, already discussed above. For this universe of social cooperation money is only a means to an end (and not an end in itself, as for capital). When the purchased commodities exit the sphere of circulation into these non-capitalist spheres of social cooperation (households, associations, networks etc.), they often enter the culturally complex and politically diverse and variegated sphere of the commons for which money is not the goal but only a way of reaching the goal. The cultural and physical reproduction of labour power, the value-creating commodity, so critically important for capital, occurs in such a sphere outside capital but, of course, strictly coupled to it. The other system capital must seek support from is the ecological system upon which all forms of social organisation depend. This has of course its own laws, homodynamic mechanisms through which it absorbs and processes the externalities of capital.

This impasse can thus be seen in two facts. First, the micro and macro systems of social reproduction, which have been atomised, flexibilised, precarised and strangled by debt and the reduction of wages and welfare over the last thirty years. These systems have no realistic prospect of betterment, given the current course of the economic crisis and the recipes on the tables of the global elites. In the Global South, these systems are also shattered by the resource enclosures that have devastated many communities. Both in the North and in the South reproduction systems face an increasing difficulty to support capital with further absorption of its cost-shifting externalities, because to do so would undermine their own reproduction. Secondly, the ecosystem is showing increasing inability to support capital in its endless quest for increased

resource extraction and use of the atmosphere as bottomless greenhouse gases sink. The imperative questions are therefore: can capital renew itself as a social force of 'creative destruction' and transformation and break its impasse on its own terms (with all the 'negative externalities' that any new phase of capitalist growth bring about)? Or can another social force emerge and coagulate social cooperation in a direction that would break the impasse by fighting the chains of the old and constitute the new? And, in the latter scenario, would this be an emancipatory social force?

Conclusion, or the capitalism-commons monster

Capitalism has reached an impasse, the overcoming of which, if done in its own terms, will produce a social and ecological apocalypse at worst, and an intensification of social conflict at best. How can capital overcome this impasse? The difficulty lies in the fact that if the current economic system is to survive it will have to continue to push for strategies of growth (i.e., accumulation). Capital's systemic need for growth derives not only from its elemental need for accumulation through a cost-cutting and cost-externalising process of competition. Growth is also necessary as a way to reconcile a profit-maximising mode of *production* with hierarchical modes of *distribution*. If 'all boats are lifted by a rising tide' there will be less pressure to address inequality through the redistribution strategies formulated in struggles for social justice.

Yet, today, all the strategies and fixes available for capital to pursue growth in the world system will only intensify the crisis of social and ecological reproduction, amplifying and widening the range of resistance, even if there is no focal, programmatic point. Capital is therefore pressed to shift the mode of governance of social relations, or at least to fine-tune neoliberal governance in such a way as to contain the costs associated with the crisis of social reproduction and limit public expenditures necessary to police and control the rebellions generated by the crisis. In both cases *capital needs other systems and forms of sociability to fortify its agenda*. The 'fix' needed by capital when a crisis threatens social stability cannot be drawn exclusively from the pool of usual 'fixes' adopted in times of cyclical recessions – that is, periodic crises of over-accumulation which can be dealt with only with relocation of investment, localised devaluation of assets and labour power (De Angelis 2007, 270 n. 17); or some spatial fix (Harvey 1999) – that is, the creation of built environment to displace crisis. This leads me to my second thesis: to solve, or at least to address, this impasse, capital needs the commons, or, at least, specific,

domesticated versions of them. It needs a *commons fix* (De Angelis 2013), especially in order to deal with the devastation of the social fabric as a result of the current crisis of reproduction. Since neoliberalism is not about to give up its management of the world it will most likely have to ask the commons to help manage the devastation it creates. And this means: if the commons are not there, capital will have to promote them somehow.

On the other hand, commons are also systems that could do the opposite: they could create a social basis for alternative ways of articulating social production, independent from capital and its prerogatives. Indeed, today it is difficult to conceive of emancipation from capital – and achieving new solutions to the demands of *buen vivir* social and ecological justice – without at the same time organising on the terrain of commons the non-commodified systems of social production. Commons are not just a ‘third way’ beyond state and market failures; they are a vehicle for emerging communities of struggle to claim ownership to their own conditions of life and reproduction. The demands for greater democracy, increasing since the 1970s and exploding worldwide since 2008 in the face of the social and economic crisis, are really grassroots democratic demands to control the means of social reproduction. Democratic freedoms imply personal investments and responsibilities, and commons are vehicles for negotiating these responsibilities and corresponding social relations and *modes* of production through ‘commoning’.

Hence, there is in fact a double impasse, for both capital and the social movements. Capital needs the commons to deal with the crisis as much as social movements need to confront capital’s enclosures of the commons in order to construct serious alternatives and prevent capital’s attempts to co-opt the commons. Hence, it is crucial not only to defend existing commons from enclosures, but also to shape new commons as they become a crucial terrain of struggle. This value struggle lies at the heart of the commons’ potential as a social system and force that might overcome the hegemony of capital.

Writing in prison between 1929 and 1935, at a time of the consolidation of fascism in Italy, Antonio Gramsci argued in an often-quoted passage: ‘The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters’ (Gramsci 1971). A monster is an imaginary or legendary creature that combines parts from various animal or human forms. Fascism and Nazism have been one type of this monster. Stalinism was another. Today, the articulation between capital, a system that recognises no limit in its boundless accumulation, and a

system that must recognise limits because it is only from within limits that it can reproduce life, love, affects, care and sustainability, may well give way to another monstrous social construction ... or not.

Much will depend on us. Whether the avenue ahead is one of commons co-option or emancipation is *not* a given. It will depend on political processes that have yet to be developed. Although a critical analysis of capital is necessary, it is not sufficient. The 'cell' form of the social force that is responsible for establishing and reproducing life (or, alternatively, for failing to sustain life, depending upon the power relations), and through this to abolish capital, we call today 'the commons'. By cell form I mean the general social form upon which this movement can be generated, the *sine qua non* without which no weaving of cells into a new social fabric without oppression, exploitation and injustice is possible. The commons is the cell form within which social cooperation for life-reproduction generates *powers-to*³ – the only basis by which people can multiply their powers to the nth degree through networked activity that overcomes the boundaries of locality and challenges the *power-over* the commons established in different forms by capital.

Yet there are at least two things that need to be taken into consideration in order to develop powers-to as an effective force. First, we should not romanticise commons. Actual commons can be distorted, and be oppressive or emancipatory. When we enter the system-like loops of an established commons, we immediately notice what is at odds with our best-held values, beliefs and cultural mores. Too often, however, we decide to judge the commons on the grounds of the values they espouse in relation to ours. For example, some activists tend to build communities based on political affinity, others on the basis of religious faith. In these *identity-based* commons, a clear boundary is established around the commons that prevents it from expanding unless the outside embraces the values of the inside. 'Conversion' here is the main mechanism of commons development, a mechanism, however, so obviously inadequate from the perspective of the challenges of building an alternative to capital in the midst of an emergent crisis of social reproduction. I have encountered radical social centres that refused to engage with the local community on the terrain of reproduction because the cultural marks of that community did not match with the principles of the activists.

3 For a discussion of power-to as contrasted to power-over, see Holloway 2002. For a critical engagement in light of the problematic of the organisation of alternatives to capital, see De Angelis 2005.

Thus, instead of triggering a process in which these cultural marks could be engaged on the terrain of practice with the local community – for example, by promoting forms of communalisation of reproduction such as child or elder care – clear identity boundaries were embedded in the social-centre commons, thus ensuring that commons’ insularity and vulnerability. Identity politics here is a *barrier* to the development of new emancipatory positions through commoning.

Second, capital can be confronted only to the extent that commons of social reproduction, and of everyday life reproduction in particular (Federici 2011), are developed as key sources of powers-to. The social-reproduction commons are those commons developed out of the needs of their participants to reproduce some basic aspects of their own lives: health, food, water, education, housing, care, energy. The development of these commons is strategically crucial in generating and testing emancipatory and progressive alternatives. Such commons must address people’s basic needs in ways that empower them to refuse the demands of capital by offering direct access to alternative means of life. If the economy is struggle, it is ultimately between capital systems and commons systems, and by developing and intensifying their autonomy from capital commons also acquire greater power to wage this struggle.

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